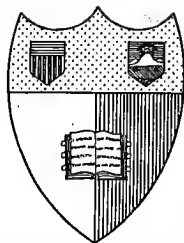


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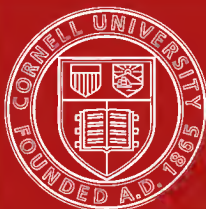
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# **French Literary Studies**





# French Literary Studies

By

T. B. RUDMOSE-BROWN

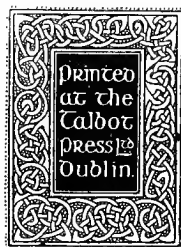
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To  
Cyril Credequer

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## PREFATORY NOTE.



ARTS of the Essays on "Stuart Merrill" and "Francis Vielé-Griffin" are reprinted, by permission, from *Sinn Fein*: part of the Introductory Essay from the *Irish Review*: some of the translations from Ronsard and Louise Labé and the poem entitled *Pastel*, in the Essay on "The Poets of the Eighteenth Century," from *T.C.D.* I have to thank my friend Mr. Cyril Crevequer for innumerable suggestions: he has read the whole book in MS. and in proof, and has helped me far more than any formal acknowledgment can indicate. The Essay on "Verlaine" is almost entirely his: all the translations from Verlaine are from his pen, and also the poem quoted at the end of the Essay on "The Poets of the Eighteenth Century." I am, however, entirely responsible for the defects of my work.

T. B. R.-B.



# FRENCH LITERARY STUDIES

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## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

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### THE POINT OF VIEW.

#### I.



HE poets whose profiles I shall attempt to catch as they bend over their manuscripts or breathe the scented dawn upon their thresholds, are alike in one thing only. They loved Art with a love as passionate as a lover's for his mistress or a mystic's for his God. They had no "message" and desired none. Did I speak otherwise of them, Scève, in some recondite paradise or on some lonely mountain top, united at last with his Pernette du Guillet, Ronsard enthroned in the Temple of Art, Bertin and Delille conversing decorously with the fair and fragile ladies of some Elysian Versailles, Leconte de Lisle on the fields of asphodel, Merrill in his supernal Fontainebleau, would stoop and blast me with their everlasting scorn. And how should I meet Vielé-Griffin's passionate eyes averted sorrowfully from Helen of the russet hair or Le Cardonnell's lifted reproachfully from his breviary?

James Elroy Flecker was right. The place of the poet is not leadership: he shows the

way to no heroic time to come. He may sing of heroes: he does not create them. It is an accident that his record of their prowess is their best monument. True, it is that—

“ . . . if Pindar celebrate  
Great Hiero, Lord of Syracuse,  
Or Theron, chief of Acragas,  
These despots wisely may refuse  
Record in unenduring brass.”

But it is true only because brass moulders away and stone weathers; while, of old, the poet's words handed from father to son, and, to-day, the printed record, perpetually renewed, are more enduring. Pindar celebrated Hiero and Theron because it pleased him to do so, not to stimulate other sovereigns to follow in their footsteps.

The millenium will not come a day the sooner for all the poets in the world. “Art for Art's sake” is just as meaningless a formula as “Social Art.” The poet is not (to quote the defunct *Pioneer*) a “seer . . . who uses the things of Art for an ulterior purpose.” He has no “ideal of service.” But neither does he sit aloof in impenetrable glory, making lonely music amid the ruin of the world. The poet is no longer dishevelled, wild-eyed, half seer and half mænad, pointing the road to some imagined Heaven; nor is he some mad pontiff led in chains, imagining the people bow to him—at the head of the Bacchic procession of drunken politicians, thinking to lead them, like a bejewelled and bedizened sovereign, helpless beneath his tawdry crown. He goes no more in



fancy-dress to the dancing-hall of life. He has left his halo in the cloak-room and lost the ticket. He judges pigs, edits papers, writes novels, teaches French or geography, and makes up prescriptions like the most mundane of mortals. He aspires to no apocalyptic onslaught on the portals of Heaven, to no spurious demagogic glory: he has forgotten to tear his hair and beat his breast and acclaim himself the accursed of God. Lamartine and Hugo have had their day. Prophets and charlatans are no more. Chateaubriand and Baudelaire have come and gone.

I will not even admit that Art is "for Life's sake." At worst, this is the cry of the propagandist. At best, it only asserts—what is perfectly true and quite meaningless—that Art, like everything else, subserves the ultimate purpose of the universe.

Art has no purpose. "Art for Art's sake," "Social Art," and "Art for Life's sake" are equally untrue. For Art is an effect, not a cause. Art is like a sunset or the flowers of the field. Like them, of course, it may produce results, but the results are incidental and variable. Lovers may kiss the sweeter for a sunset or a meadow of buttercups; but the sun does not set nor the flowers grow for them. Nor are the possible results of Art the reason of its being. The sea produces results. Earthquakes produce results. They do not seek to produce results. They are the expression of the earth in travail of its being. No poet, if he was a real poet, ever wrote in order to produce any effect whatever upon any one at all, not even his lady-love. Art is an inevitable

product of a certain set of circumstances : it is one of the flowers of life, perhaps the finest.

The only conceivable purpose of existence demands that every unit should come to its full self-realisation. No potential value must be lost. The claim of every individuality must be asserted. Every one of us must strive, unflinchingly, to be himself. There is but one unpardonable sin, the refusal to accept the destiny we carry within us—the spiritual destiny, of course, for the body is but the transient appearance of the soul, the passing show of the world's honour and reward but the phantasmogoria of the relative in which, for the moment, we live. The way to self-realisation lies across the chasms of tradition and convention like the orange pathway spread on the sea between us and the sun. Both are, to everyone of us, unique, moving as we move, ever present. At the set of the earthly sun, our road of light is lost in darkness. But only if God set in our soul is the way of the spirit obscured, leading to the red gates of the transcendental dawn ! Like Lord de Tabley's "Two Ancient Kings," we must go—

"Heroic hearts, upon our lonely way."

"Which of us has his desire, or having it, is satisfied ?" To Leconte de Lisle this meant despair. Horror-stricken and projecting himself into the consciousness of the race, he heard

"le long rugissement de la Vie Eternelle "

To us, if we would live, life must be a pilgrimage, a journey in search of the fulfilment of desire only to be fulfilled before the throne of God. All things

are, in themselves, vain. No desire can be satisfied. We make ever for a receding goal. No kiss is worth the getting. Despair waits upon us. But we know that through disillusion and only through disillusion can the fulness of life come to us. Only through desire and the vanity of desire fulfilled can we pass to new and nobler desire. The fiery stake and the flaming crown await us. But were the pyre put out the light of Heaven were quenched and deathless Hope were dead!

The poet, like any of us, seeks to become himself. But there is more. Every intense individuality will express itself. It will seek to realise its approach to self-hood, its "becoming," not only internally but externally. The artist's expression is Art. No individuality can escape this law. If there is no attempt at external expression, there is an inward refusal to be oneself, a shrinking from life. Poetry is the outward expression of the poet's will to be himself. It is the effect of the causes that go to make up the potentiality of the poet: of circumstances in their widest sense, of the epoch in which he lives and by which he is, to some extent, conditioned: of the past of the particular art in which he seeks expression; but, far more importantly, of the obscure and undecipherable impulses that constitute his personality in its inmost sense, of his will to be, that is, of the "Drang" which pushes him forward on the road of spiritual evolution, on the way towards God.

To check, or attempt to check, this expression of the poet, as of any other potentiality, is to set back also his inward self-expression, to commit spiritual murder, to be guilty of sacrilege against God. The

critic has not to ask if a poet's expression, his poetry, is in accordance or not with the accepted conventions of the world. His duty is to disengage from the poet's work the part of the poet's surroundings, the part of his historical place in his art, and, beyond and above these, the part of the man expressing himself. The poet, then, expresses himself because he must. Incidentally he makes beauty. To the world, if he says anything, he says: "Take it or leave it!" And the world mostly leaves it, afraid for the little house of cards it calls Society, the refuge of the Eternal No.

## II.

The great epics and much of the best lyric work of the Middle Ages are anonymous: like the spiring Cathedrals of France, the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Couronnement de Louis* and most of the love songs and *chansons de toile* are the expression of a common aspiration. They are the fine flowers of mediæval society. I do not mean that they sprang into full being without an actual author. I mean that we do not know who wrote them, and that it matters not who did. Even the signed work of individuals is a social rather than a personal expression. It is of little significance that Adenet le Roi wrote the romaunt of *Berthe aux grands pieds*, or that Chrétien de Troyes wrote *Le*

*Chevalier au Lion*. If the Middle Ages in love with love itself had written the first part of the *Romaunt of the Rose* it would not have been different. That Guillaume de Lorris held the pen of the lover is of no moment. The dawn and evening songs of the Troubadours, their *tensons*, *sirventes*, complaints and *descorts* conform rigorously to a common pattern, both in form and spirit.

The personal note begins with the Renaissance. There were no doubt forerunners, dissidents from the convention of their time, like Charles d'Orléans and Villon; but they were late and the dawn had almost begun. For the Sixteenth Century it was sufficient that the poet, putting into words his vision of the world, and doing his homage to Our Lady Beauty, should express himself. The Renaissance was occupied with individual values: not with the elaboration of a social system. It was a time of break-up, of clash and passion and of great personalities. The *Délie* of Maurice Scève is not the expression of Lyonese society but of Scève himself: Ronsard is Ronsard and no one else.

With the Seventeenth Century Art becomes again, at least in theory, impersonal. Society was all-important. Courtly France inspired Corneille, Molière and Racine: they are the blossoming of a social conception and a social code. The uncompromising Alceste would even praise the verses of Oronte if the King himself expressly required it. Boileau and La Fontaine urged the poet to be natural and true. But they meant that he must accept the conventions, formal and intrinsic, of the Court of Louis XIV. Nature and Truth were nothing else. Reason dictated such conformity and usage demanded it. The "libertins,"

it is true, survivors of the sixteenth century, like Tristan l'Hermite, Théophile de Viau, Saint-Amant, or incorrigible individualists like Scarron, or the Abbé de Boisrobert, or Savinien de Cyrano-Bergerac went their own way and incurred the odium of nonconformity.

The Eighteenth Century accepted the same doctrine. Art was still social; but society had divided. All that counted in France was not gathered round the Regent or Pompadour or Du Barry; the third estate was coming to its own. The Court and the Bourgeoisie sought divergent expression. Voltaire and the minor poets are the product of Versailles; in Diderot the middle class found a voice. There was, however, in Rousseau a strong protest of the individualist doctrine: and he gained the day. The poets of Romanticism expressed only themselves.

### III.

The distinction of social and personal art does not carry with it a coincident distinction of didactic Art and Art for Art's sake. Social art is not necessarily didactic nor personal art necessarily an end in itself. Hugo, personal to excess, is a notable example of Art trespassing on every field, moral, political, religious. The best work of the Middle Ages was not didactic.

The conception of Art as a Teacher arose, no doubt, out of the mnemonic use of verse by the mediæval moralists. The *Vie de Saint Léger* set a bad example of merely versified lives of saints and other works of edification, broken, it is true, here and there, by a really poetic production, such as the wonderfully har-

monious *Vie de Saint Alexis* with its flashes of overwhelming passion, and amid its crudity, touches and whole stanzas of perfect artistic mastery.

An eminent critic in his *Hamlet* refers to "the popular tendency, which was also a Greek and a Renaissance tendency, to regard Art as having a didactic function. . . ." As regards the Renaissance in France he is certainly in error. Nowhere is the sense of Art in and for itself, as the expression of the poet's being in beauty, more pure of all alloy than in the work of the first great French poet of the Renaissance. Scève had no didactic purpose. Pontus de Tyard had a visitor one day who, finding him reading Scève's *Délie*, took up the book and threw it down contemptuously after reading a verse or two. To him Tyard replied that little would Scève care whether fools understood him or not—"qu' aussi se souciait bien peu le seigneur Maurice que *Délie* fût vue ni maniée des veaux."

Ronsard, indeed, wrote a series of very noble didactic poems. But Art never stooped to be the handmaid of religion or politics: it might assume, as a sacred duty, the guidance of nations and of kings. The Renaissance never lost its nobility of outlook. Art could teach, because it stood above all other manifestations of the human mind. It had the right to dictate, because it knew. Later writers used the forms of Art to encompass moral ends because to them Art was a mean thing, valuable only in virtue of its uses.

The high conception the Sixteenth Century held of didactic art may be expressed in the words of the Jesuit Père Lemoyne, an "attardé" of the Renais-

sance, who wrote the best epic poem of the French Seventeenth Century. He maintained, in the days of Boileau, a lofty view of Art. He protested against the low conception of didactic art which the mean spirits of the day opposed to the great conception of the Sixteenth Century, and declared that the Poet is "le commis du Magistrat éternel, le Coopérateur et l'Agent de Dieu . . . le Précepteur des Rois et des Conquérants."

For the Seventeenth Century was pettily didactic, if anything that ministered to the grandiose society of the Roi Soleil can be called petty. The greater genres—epic, tragedy,—aimed at shaping the citizen. The lesser—comedy, lyric, pastoral—either at amusing him with propriety or at developing his social accomplishments. Individual values were of little importance compared with social perfection; were, indeed, to be strenuously diverted into conformity with the social ideal.

Molière might seem to be an exception. His Dorante in the *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes* declares that "la règle de toutes les règles" is to please. But Molière, a writer of comedy, does not claim to mould society like tragic and epic poets, but only to amuse with propriety those who already conform to the conduct and attitude of all decent citizens. To aim at pleasing these is in fact accepting the desirability of adapting Art to the needs of polite society. He is, if not (in Lemoyne's words), a "Parfumeur" or a "Faiseur de Ragoûts" at least little more than a "Bateleur de Réduits" and a "Plaisant de Ruelles." He would have been ineffably shocked at the bare idea that the end of Art could possibly be the expression of



the poet's personality. He agreed with Boileau in laughing to scorn those "dissidents" and "libertins" who preferred to think for themselves, to write for themselves, and to be themselves.

Racine was a very great poet. He accepted the Seventeenth Century ideal outwardly; he may even have believed that he accepted it inwardly. But he was too great a poet to act upon it. In his tragedies—which are among the very greatest poems ever written—he did express himself: his vision of the world and his attitude towards God and man and love and death. By the very force of his personality he imposed himself even on Boileau. But Boileau and the Seventeenth Century with him persisted in misunderstanding him and in accepting him and praising him for qualities of conformity that he did not possess. They took *Phèdre* as a moral lesson—"les moindres fautes sévèrement punies"—and *Athalie* as an illustration of the Christian doctrine that was the outward and accepted foundation of social order in a century which, if it was not religious in any real sense and did not deeply believe, yet found in the forms of belief and worship a necessary corollary to the monarchic constitution of government.

Boileau damned Père Lemoyne in spite of his exposition of the Seventeenth Century doctrine of Art—damned him, we must suppose, because he stated it with such an intensity of conviction and passion that the doctrine, on his lips, became rather a personal expression than the objective exposition of a universally accepted social axiom. Moreover, in spite of Père Lemoyne's theories, his epic *Saint Louis* and many of his lyrics come so near being real poetry that they sin

against the Seventeenth Century doctrine of conformity. In endeavouring to guide and mould the polity of the State and the conduct of its citizens, Lemoyne expressed himself with so great an individuality of artistic utterance as to constitute a sin against the social conception of Art.

The bourgeois school of the Eighteenth Century was exclusively and militantly didactic. Diderot and the writers of his school were like Monsieur Poirier. He could see nothing in a landscape entitled "A Summer Evening." "Ca ne dit rien!" is his criticism: and he instances as a perfect example of Art, "une gravure qui représente un chien au bord de la mer, aboyant devant un chapeau de matelot." Diderot adored the sentimentality and moral platitudes of Richardson and Lillo. Greuze was his ideal painter: he cared nothing for Watteau. Boucher and Fragonard revolted his bourgeois soul. He would have wept in contortions of "attendrissement" before *Bubbles* or *Christ and the Boy Scout*. Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, though individualists in Art, were didactic. *Paul et Virginie* is perhaps the supreme example of the positively indecent morality of the Eighteenth Century. Delille, though not a moral sentimentalist like the bourgeois writers, insists on parading his professional stock-in-trade in the very midst of his loveliest passages. The Versailles School was, however, in general, anything but didactic. No one could have less desire to preach than Bertin or Cardinal Bernis.

The Romanticists revived the grandiose heresy of Lemoyne. In Hugo the prophet, not to say the charlatan, threatened to engulf the poet. If Art is a garden of flowers, Hugo's art is too often a monstrous

floral clock or the Royal monogram in tulips or a loyal design in red, white and blue (or shall I rather say in orange, white and green, for Hugo was always a rebel!). He was not content that his garden should delight the senses with shape and colour and perfume: he must insist on planting a moral or political "Dogs' Cemetery" of genera and species. He is a Professor of Botany, not an inspired gardener like Jasmin who ministered to the Pompadour, nor an Odilon Redon who painted roses burning like a mid-summer noon and larkspurs as blue as the noonday sky and as light and airy as celestial butterflies.

Musset had no didactic aim. His *Stances à la Malibran*—the loveliest music in all French poetry—are simply an incomparable Hymn to Beauty. Musset had no doctrine. He was just a poet. Gautier began the protest against the Romantic conception of Art which led to the Parnassian school and the work of Heredia and Leconte de Lisle. Since then French literary art has kept to the true doctrine: the protagonists of didacticism have been, happily, entirely devoid of any artistic gifts they could debase or pervert to their purpose. No school of any account has arisen to dispute the sway of "l'Art pour l'Art." In all the diversity and clash of poetic credos this has remained the corner-stone of the faith. Decadents, symbolists, the *jeunes* have respected Art: in every *café*, in every ivory tower, they have worshipped Our Lady Beauty with unfaltering praise and unconquerable faith. The other doctrine is left to the Barbarian howling without: to the inept, the unclean, the *masques* dancing their obscene carnival around the still porticos of Art: to Silenus outside the Garden of the Rose.

## II.—MAURICE SCEVE AND THE POETIC SCHOOL OF LYONS.

### I.



THE Renaissance stood for life in its fulness—the cult of nature, the development of the individual and the realization of beauty. It was not anti-spiritual. All through the manifold web of its activities is woven the subtle thread of a new and wonderful spiritual intensity—that strange neo-Platonism which, with all the rest, coming from Italy, mingled with the mediæval conception of “L’Amour Courtois,” and found in France, perhaps its chief exponent in Margaret Queen of Navarre, in whose *Comédie à quatre personnages jouée au Mont de Marsan* (1547) the Queen of the Love of God proclaims the superiority of the neo-Platonic ideal of love over Calvinism, Catholicism, and Worldliness.

After the imprisonment of the Middle Ages the Renaissance brought new life to the spirit, a breath of wind searching out all nooks and crannies of scholasticism, and sweeping them clean with the great cleanness of life. It was as if some cataclysm had thrown down the unscaleable walls of the prison-house and opened a prospect of measureless country beyond. Instead of a pleasant valley (as it had seemed) set in the encircling hills of authority, men found themselves on a mountain-top, with the world stretching at their

feet, virgin and splendid for the adventurous traveller. Art was the fine flower of this new, more spacious life. In the poets of the Renaissance, in the French Ronsard, for example—this sense of bigness, this lilt of the soul, untrammelled now, toward unsuspected glories, is at its full. Their song floats golden and illimitable on the wings of their spirit's freedom. They are men living life to the utmost, men in all their glory of intellect and passion and emotion, no longer infants swaddled in the bands of Church and State and established doctrine!

It is true that if much had been gained, something too had been lost. Faith save only in themselves had gone. The men of the Renaissance were heretics in all things. The Middle Ages had placed a veto on all thought that transcended the dogma of the Church and the accepted theories of statecraft. Unable to move beyond a certain narrow range of speculation—a speculation in which the conclusion was given as well as the premisses, and only the syllogism left open, like a journey to one city by many roads—the greater minds of the Middle Ages had been forced to concentrate. The Art of the "Dark Ages" had in depth and intensity what it had not in breadth. Driven inward by the restrictions of Church and State, confined to a narrow choice of possible subjects, the poet was forced back on new aspects of old passions, new attitudes to old conceptions. There is in the mediæval lyric, in the *Chansons de toile* like

Vente l'ore et li raim crollent :  
Qui s'entraiment soef dorment. . .

in the Dawn Songs like

Gaite de la tor,  
Gardez entor,

or

Or ne haz rien tant com le jor,  
Amis, qui me depart de vos. . .

or in Charles d'Orléans or Froissart, every note of passion and of serenity, every mood and experience from the copper glories of passion-laden sunsets and the hot perfume of still dark meadows on summer nights to the fresh wind of spring sweeping over the cowslips at dawn; and everything stands out with that strange, clear-cut precision as of enamelled fairy meads and painted roofs which is so much more mysterious and full of suggestion even than mist or twilight or rainy woods. *Aucassin et Nicolette*—is that not Art? Or the frail beauty of the *Romaunt of the Rose*,

Ou l'art d'amors est tote enclose

or the story of Tristram and Iseult. The low sky like a starred canopy and the tapestried backgrounds of mediæval life may have been uncongenial to science and philosophy, to statecraft in a large sense, to the attitude of him who, like Faust, in the Second Part, stands before Nature, "ein Mann allein," out of accord with the large harmonies and clear lines of Greek art, but they were not inconsistent with the development of a most passionate theory of human relationships, with the conception of that "Amour Courtois," which, if it did not break the heavy clouds of the sultry sky, filtered into the heart and soul of the Lover a new intensity,

like dew upon the fresh grass and buttercups of a dawn-lighted meadow, giving him instead of the hard finite expanse of the free Pagan world an interior infinity recking nothing of outward and material trammels: which stirred the dying embers of the old-world fire, if not to the clear flame of spirituality, at least to the red smoulder of passion. In the shadow of frail poplars on sunset lawns, the Middle Age poured its concentrated passion between the prison walls of a narrow world, each line a jewelled facet of intense light blazing with love long-pent and restrained desire.

The Renaissance burst the dam. What the Renaissance gained in freedom and lilt, it lost in concentration. No fixed boundaries subsisting to bar the way of the adventurous, nothing remained sacred now but Beauty, that dangerous Beauty the Middle Ages had so terribly feared, as some Siren insidiously calling beyond the prison-walls and drawing men away from the comfortable orderliness of uncontroverted dogma. But the loss itself is almost a gain. Who can for more than a moment regret it? Now all was free, men pursued Beauty whithersoever she led, deserting all things for her, travelling alone along perilous roads or away from roads altogether, following ever that strange, new, wonderful fen-light, the Jack o' Lan-thorn of Art—our Lady Beauty, at whose feet they saw, prostrate in adoration, all forms of being and action and Life itself! And nevermore will this search for Beauty, this *ripae ulterioris amor* cease to be a mainspring of life in the Latin countries. The night of Maurice Scève's *Délie* (1544) is strown with its

fire : in him spiritual passion and the love of beauty are made one ; and it were a bold critic who would undertake again to separate the worship of the Queen of the Love of God and the Pagan Goddess Beauty in the work of anyone who came after him in France. There will be times when men think they hold the elusive sprite in their nets of rules and canons of taste, there will be times when Art becomes a consuming passion and men talk of Art for Art's sake, as if Art were not inevitably the flower of life, splendid when life is full, weak and anæmic when life totters and sinks beneath the onslaught of authority or of the powers of evil. But evermore the mysterious and ineffable touch of those supernatural fingers, of that indefinable vision, which we call Beauty—which, in the eyes of Vielé-Griffin became Life itself, Helen of the russet hair—will glorify and destroy, coming, alas, most to those who seek it least, but all souls being tuned to its music and stirred, if they will or not, to the quest of the new Graal !

## II.

Marot is the faint blush of the dawn : if Art be the touchstone of the Renaissance—I mean the conscious effort to produce Beauty—then Marot is still mediæval. He shares, however, to some extent, the ideas of his patron Margaret Queen of Navarre, but he achieves Art, like all the poets of the Middle Ages, outside Provence, only by accident. He loved sincerely—he was not capable of passion—and he wrote sincere and moving love poems to his mistress Anne of Alençon, niece of Francis I. and of Margaret. But he had neither the concentration of



## SCEVE AND POETIC SCHOOL OF LYONS 23

the Middle Ages nor the new note of spirituality which is the emotional counterpart of the artistic effort of the Renaissance. He had nothing of the carnal passion of the Troubadours nor of that strange new Love that came from Italy, half carnal and half mystic, incarnated by Petrarch in his Laura. His translations of Petrarch have lost the spirit of Petrarch. Here and there, perhaps, its shadow has fallen upon him, but he has not known it. With Mellin de Saint Gelais, he introduced the sonnet into France, but his sonnets are empty : the soul of the sonnet is not in them. His dominant note is unstudied grace and a mournful delicacy of sentiment—the French word *tendresse* alone expresses it.

“ And when I look upon my brown-haired mistress  
Young, comely, royal-born of godlike Kings  
Playing the spinet, and her voice and fingers  
Join in sweet harmony. . . . ”

The mystery of Art is not there : there is no passion nor exaltation. The rival of two Kings in the favours of the cruel Diana of Poitiers and the accepted lover of a Princess, Marot did not rise to the heights of Scève who loved a courtesan, nor of the two courtesans who loved great poets, Pernette du Guillet and Louise Labé.

### III.

The morning star of the French Renaissance was Maurice Scève of Lyons. The amethystine wine of sunrise fills his goblet : he has the grave purity of the dawn just breaking, not the riotous

splendour of sunset. Into the mould of Serafino's epigram he poured the *Dialoghi d'amore* of Léon Hébrieu and the *Angoisses et remèdes d'amour* of the grand Rhétoriqueur Jean Bouchet, the intimate friend of Ronsard's father. He turned the "Gather ye roses" of his Italian model to the praise of love undying, but he kept the overwrought preciousness of his master. And to all he added the intensity of a tortured and sensitive soul, the keenness of an acute analytical mind and a transcending passion for artistic form.

The love he celebrated and in whose flame his verse is tempered is not

"Ce Cupido aisé  
Aveugle, enfant, nud, incertain, volage  
Qui tant d'amer à son doux ha meslé,"

but the great Love of which Rabelais spoke when he declared that :

"Amour ha tel effect  
Qu'il ne peult estre en cœur de folle femme,  
Ains en l'esprit de l'homme plus parfait."

Scève had drunk deep of Margaret of Navarre and of Plato, Petrarch and the Italian Platonists. He, like Margaret, had wished :

"Mon ame perir et noier  
Or puisse en ceste douce mer  
D'amour, où n'y a point d'amer;  
Je ne sens corps, ame ne vie,  
Sinon amour, et n'ay envie

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De paradis, ni d'enfer craincte,  
Mais que sans fin je sois estraincte  
A mon amy, unye et joincte."

The illimitable night of his obscurity is strown with innumerable stars. Never has a poet knelt with more passionate worship at the feet of our Lady Beauty nor stretched more longing hands towards her. And here and there he has succeeded in putting into words of inconceivable fulness and glory the striving of his incomparable soul. And where the light blazes through the darkness of his failure, not Ronsard himself has attained the immeasurable brightness of his verse "which Love tempered in his flame." Scève was of those who like Petrarch, his master, have had the intolerable vision of God and of Love His Minister: he saw Love enthroned in the heart of the cornfield and in the depths of the wood; sunset and sunrise, the daffodils in the spring dew and the dripping leaves of the fall told him of Love's rule, divine and eternal, in Nature as truly as in Revelation. And Love to him went accompanied by joy and sorrow, both eternal as Life.

Scève was born in 1504 or 1505 in Lyons, the Gate of Italy, during the governorship of Cæsar Borgia. Little is known of his life. Margaret of Navarre turned him to the study of Platonism: he had already found the reputed tomb of Laura at Avignon. He was indeed the first scholar of Lyons when in 1544 he took his place as her most admirable poet by the "profonde éloquence et mirable facture" of his *Délie object de la plus haute vertu* (in the Italian sense), a series of 449 dizains in honour of Pernette

du Guillet, his mistress, one of the brilliant group of Lyonesse poetesses, that included Louise Labé, Clémence de Bourges and Scève's own sisters, Claudine and Sybille. The high imaginings of Scève found France in travail : her serious mood accorded with his "docte gravité" ; the easy charm of Marot could not fill the aspirations, intellectual and emotional, of the men of 1544. Charles V. was at the Gates of Paris : Henry VIII. in Picardy : Etienne Dolet, who stands for the individualism of the Renaissance, was in prison. Scève achieved a universal reputation. Sibilet, writing five years later, speaks of him as a classic. Délie took her place beside Beatrice and Laura.

It is not easy to give an idea of the charm of *Délie*, of the passionate relations of the poet to Pernette du Guillet, of the difficult perfection of his verse. He is stiff and mannered, often obscure, but never careless or facile : he, of all poets who ever wrote, respected his Art, and sought only to express consummately his high desire : " le haut désir qui nuit et jour m'émeut."

Pernette du Guillet died in 1545 at the age of 25, and in the same year appeared her poems, *Rymes de gentille et vertueuse* (again in the Italian sense) *dame Pernette du Guillet, Lyonnaise*. All she wrote is the expression of an intense and unchangeable devotion to the poet and scholar who, with his golden words, had turned her " de noire en blanche " and filled the night of her ignorance with knowledge and freedom. In *La Nuit* she tells how, in the land of dreams, the kingdom of silence, she saw the dark figures of Vain-glory, Ambition and Shame. Dawn breaks and

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drives away "ceste tourbe nuisante." The dawn—her "cher jour"—is Maurice Scève.

Scève's *Saulsaye, Eglogue de la Vie Solitaire* appeared in 1547. It is the poet's lament for his dead mistress, cast in the form of a Pastoral dialogue between two Shepherds Antonio and Filermo. Filermo is too near his sorrow to seek comfort. He will remain in his rustic solitude "seigneur des boys grans et espais," despite his friend's urging to seek the distractions of the town.

Next year Scève organised the Pageant with which Lyons welcomed Henri II. He was the undisputed master of the brilliant Lyonese school, grouped round Louise Labé: Pontus de Tyard, the translator of Léon Hébrieu's *Dialoghi* and a writer of Platonic dialogue himself: Tyard's cousin, Guillaume des Autels, the critic of the school: Olivier de Magny, the most passionate of Louise Labé's many lovers: Peletier du Mans, the most curious of the many-sided figures of the French Renaissance, mathematician, phonetician, poet and critic: Jean de Vauzelles, the friend and publisher of Holbein: his brother Mathieu, the husband of Claudine Scève, and many more.

But Scève's heart was not in the worldly glory he had won. We know that he left Lyons and travelled in many countries, returning only to write and publish his *Microcosme* in 1562. After this there is no trace of him. The most famous poet of his day utterly disappears. He took no part in the wars of Religion: he is not mentioned as a victim of any of the massacres, Huguenot or Catholic, of the next ten years. The date of his death is unknown.

Legend, however, tells that, after Pernette's death Scève tried to live his old life, the life of a great poet and scholar, the friend and favourite of Kings, the admired of Lyons and of the world. Fair ladies threw themselves at his feet and princes vied for his favour. But it was all in vain. He wandered the world a prey to loneliness and to all the horrors of parting for ever from his only possible Beloved. He plumbed the deeps of sorrow, learnt the meaning of nevermore. One night, when, weary beyond all belief, broken and ready to die, he lay down on a mountain side in Syria, and the tropic moon lighted his wan face and white hair, he slept, not having slept for many days. And there came a vision to him, of Pernette in all her beauty and full of her old love, Pernette lovelier than any Helen, and she bade him for love of her return to Lyons, write the great poem they had planned together, and then return on a certain night to this Syrian desert and await her at the foot of the mountain. He awoke, and full of new life and wise with new wisdom, he returned to Lyons, and wrote the *Microcosme*, the epitome of all his learning and all his life's imagining and knowledge. Then leaving Lyons for ever behind him, and all earthly hope and earthly honour, he returned to the mountain in Syria, and there Pernette appeared to him, and they climbed the mountain together, his arm about her, her hair streaming in the night air, the light of her eyes illumining the darkness of the Syrian night, for now there was no moon. A shepherd guarding his flock of Syrian goats on the upper pastures, saw them pass, and told his master the following day that a young God had passed him leading his divine bride, and that they had

walked in brightness on the dark slope of the mountain, and had then passed on beyond his sight round a shoulder of rock, he being stricken with fear and not daring to follow.

And that was the end of Maurice Scève and Pernette du Guillet. No mortal eye saw them again. "Through love they did not die."

For Scève was the most passionate Lover of all time. To Dante Beatrice was, as Carducci says, hardly more than a theological virtue. Petrarch in his old age was filled with shame at the error of his youth: "*del mio vaneggiar vergogna è l'frutto e 'l pentirsi.*" The Lovers of the ancient world and of the Middle Ages had not his spirituality. But Scève's love of Pernette, and we know he loved her "not wisely, but too well," was transfigured by a wonderful spiritual passion that has filled even his most carnal images and sex itself with beauty and rapture till his mortal touch of her mortal body trembles and burns, in his verse as in life, with a more than mortal fire and ecstasy. In him the sensuous and the spiritual are so subtly and wonderfully interwoven that the frail beauty of a flower, the green and purple backs of a celandine's gold petals, are not only a hymn of the spirit to the divine, but a love-song to the rich beauty of some splendid mistress: the fire of whose lips, the touch of whose hand, are not only the fulfilment of desire, but the very breath of the spirit burning all dross away.

#### IV.

Scève celebrated only Pernette du Guillet: she is his and his only. He has caught her "fast for ever in a tangle of sweet rhymes." But Louise Labé, la

Belle Cordière, was sung by all the poets of the school of Lyons, and was the mistress of more than one. She was younger than Pernette du Guillet by some six years, and outlived her by twenty-one. Her legend is quite other than that of the frail and delicate mistress of Maurice Scève. Hers is a coarser fibre : her verse, too, is clearer than Scève's or Pernette du Guillet's, but not so intense or so subtle. She is passionate ; but hers is the red not the white fire : and the spiritual note is almost absent.

She was an expert in knightly exercises : she is said to have fought at the siege of Perpignan when she was only sixteen. But she fell before another Lord than Death, sought other glory than on the field of battle : her golden head was bowed before the Reaper Love, and the lance she had borne so proudly was turned against her, poisoned with the venom of Desire. It is not as

“. . . . Bradamante, ou la haute Marphise  
Sœur de Roger. . . ”

that Lyons knew her, but as the faithless wife of “ le bon Sire Aymon,” the rope maker, and a woman of ill-repute (even if some of the tales be untrue). She was a “ *Damnée de l'Amour*.” Her poems are the apologia of her life. Hers is the *Canzoniere* of passion unchecked : the strings and goads of carnal love, its unceasing and insatiable desire, the cerements and ashes of its ending, these are her matter. Her verse rings golden like Peele's or Southwell's : but it swells with the moan of intolerable pain. Like Phèdre, she is the victim of Venus Anadyomene, “ *à sa proie attachée* ” “ *Je suis le corps, toy la meilleure part,*”



she cries to her Lover : she knows it well. But like Verlaine or Baudelaire,

"Baise m'encore, rebaise moy et baise "

she asks, and will heed no morrow. The veils are torn away : we see her naked agony, burnt by the "mile torches ardentes," of her "estrangle et forte passion." She suffers, but does not regret. There is in her no whine of insincere penitence. "Blame me not," rather she cries :—

"Others than us, in spite of their high place,  
Have borne the hardship and distress of love;  
Their haughty souls, their beauty and descent  
Could not preserve them from the servitude  
Of cruel love : the noblest spirits most  
Have fallen victims, and most suddenly.  
Semiramis, a Queen of great renown,  
Who fought against the Ethiopians  
And with her armies routed their black hosts,  
Found love who harassed her so mightily  
That, conquered, she abandoned arms and rule !  
And, O my stricken Babylonian Queen,  
Where is your courage, noble in the fray.  
And where the shield, the lance you used so well  
Before whose edge the bravest was undone ?  
Where have you put the martial crested helm  
Whose shadow fell upon your head's fair gold ?  
Where is the sword, and where the coat of mail  
Wherewith you broke the daring of your foe ?"

### III.—PIERRE DE RONSARD.

#### I.



PIERRE DE RONSARD was born at the Castle of La Poissonnière, near Coutures, on the Loir, in the Vendômois, on Saturday, September 2nd, 1525. He became in 1536 a page to the Dauphin and was present at his death-bed. He then passed into the service of the Duke of Angoulême, now become Duke of Orleans, the third son of Francis I. In 1537 Ronsard went to Scotland as page to James V.'s young wife, Madeleine, daughter of Francis I. He spent two years in Scotland, with a break of a month or two, and six months in England, finally returning to France in 1540. He was then sent with the great humanist, Lazare de Baïf, on a diplomatic mission to Germany—to a religious congress at Haguenau. There he heard Calvin speak. When he came back to France he was ill and became deaf. In 1543 he left the service of Charles of Valois, who had intended him for a diplomatic career, but remained at Court as a squire of the new Dauphin, afterwards Henri II. In the same year, having determined on an ecclesiastical career, he was tonsured at Le Mans by Bishop René du Bellay, the uncle of his famous friend and fellow-poet in after years, Joachim du Bellay. His first published work, an Horatian ode, *Of the Beauties he would desire in his Lady-love* appeared in 1547. Meanwhile he had been studying Greek at Paris, and in the

same year as his first poem appeared became a Master of Arts of the University of Paris. During the period of his studies he had conceived the idea of grafting the Pindaric Ode as well as the Horatian on French literature and, after reading Scève, had revised his conception of poetry. Poetry was for him no longer a mechanical art to be learned from a book of rules and precepts, but it was Beauty incarnate clothing a passionate and intense attitude towards life.

## II.

Four women divide Ronsard's life and his work : Cassandre, Marie, Genèvre and Hélène. Cassandre he saw first when he was nineteen, and she a child of fifteen with black hair and dark eyes set in an olive face. Four years passed before he met her again, four years for the poet of rich endeavour in learning and in art, and of somewhat casual courtship of "la brune et la blonde," in his native Vendômois and at Paris. Meanwhile Cassandre had married Jean de Peigné, Lord of Pré, a neighbour of the poet's : and he came upon her gathering flowers bareheaded in an autumnal meadow. For some time Ronsard saw Cassandre frequently. In 1552 she visited him at the Château of La Poissonnière, where for a time she lay seriously ill. The intimacy that ensued seems to have made the poet over-bold : for in the same year he was finally dismissed by her for too great hardihood in courtship. He did not see her for many years and the old relations were never taken up again ; but for the last fifteen years of his life they often met as old friends. She survived him twenty years and died in 1605. D'Aubigné courted her niece, Diane de Talcy, and

her daughter, Cassandre du Pré, married an ancestor of Alfred de Musset.

Ronsard's love for Cassandre was not platonic. That is evident from the sonnets and songs of the Cassandre sequence. But it was not carnal. The poems addressed to her do not, it is true, throb with mystical passion like those of Scève to Délie. They are not, on the other hand, a sultry blaze of red roses, fullblown, like Louise Labé's to her lovers. They are like pale eglantine, blown lightly by a spring breeze beneath a high sky with scudding clouds. But Cassandre would have had them like some snow-white lily in a convent-garden: candid with passionless worship. Ronsard was not bloodless enough to please her as a lover: for him the dark roses of her cheeks were not only the earthly garment of a soul: they were also flushed olive flesh warm with the fire of human love: her perfect lips spoke not only wisdom and beauty: they were also a chalice wherein he drank the body and blood of his beloved. Her touch filled him with ineffable fire: the spirit blazed its undeniable way burning up the dross of desire: but it was a flame and not the cold light of austere and distant adoration. He desires like a shower of gold to fall drop by drop into her lap as she sleeps: to be a white bull carrying her through the April meadows: a Narcissus and she a pool that he might plunge in its cooling waters for ever. Cassandre's incomprehension drove Ronsard, in the sultry summer of his life, into the heedless intoxication of Marie's kisses. From the sparkling goblet of a rare liqueur he fell to the drunkenness of ordinary wine, and lay, rankly and unaspiring, in the

comfortable assurance of her plebeian embraces. "Silenus of the swine-herds is his name."

Marie had not the aristocratic beauty of Cassandre. She was the daughter of an innkeeper near Bourgueil : her cheeks were red—"aussi vermeille qu'une rose de mai," Ronsard says, and she had curly, chestnut-brown hair. Her charms were ample, and the poet dwells with wearisome complacency upon them.

When he loved Cassandre he aspired too high, he declares to Pontus de Tyard ; now his verse, like his love, is "désenflée" and "se dément parlant trop bassement." We tire of the perpetual lushness in which the poet wallows : we long to get away from these heavy meadows to the heights : from Tess of the D'Urbervilles to Senhouse with Sanchia in the star-strown night of her last coming. And Cassandre becomes a wonderful might-have-been : the shadow of her refusal casts long despair upon the work of her poet (for her's, in spite of all, he remains) as upon his disoriented life. For three years Ronsard remained Marie's slave ; then the attachment cooled. She had never been faithful to him : but in 1558 a very serious rival appeared in the poet's cousin, Charles de Pisseleu, Bishop of Condon and Abbot of Bourgueil, with whom Ronsard appears to have shared her favours until his cousin's death in 1564. Her early death in 1573, or thereabouts, was the occasion of a very beautiful series of poems. The instancy of his passion had long since cooled, Genèvre and a shadowy Sinope, of whom we know nothing, had come and gone, and Hélène held the field. Small wonder that the poems to Marie dead are entirely platonic : she was little more than an idealized memory of a once

glad summer. Ronsard's grief at her loss is the sorrow of an old man who realizes his age and the hopeless decline of his gallant manhood; she linked him with a past of hope and passion, and her death was the snapping of a chord in his own soul.

During the summer-time of his love for Marie, Ronsard wrote the noble *Hymn to Death*, a pæan of victory to the great Redeemer. His soul, steeped in the heavy langour of mortality, sought to burst the dull bonds of the flesh that held him a too acquiescent prisoner in the shackles of earthly desire. But the blazing light of white Anjou is in the rolling periods of the hymn: the fiery sap of summer rises irresistibly and each line is like a gold or purple grape ripened in the mid-days of Bourgueil. In a cup of vermillion Ronsard pledges Death the Arch-Beloved: and swooning at her feet, he pours his passion before her. He asks only to rest in her arms, at peace, all ardour that no mortal Bride can still consummated and assuaged in this immortal embrace!

Here Ronsard has left Petrarch and Pindar and the new-discovered Anacreon and spoken his own passion in his own way:

“ I will go seek some other sacred well,  
Whence springs an untouched stream that murmurs  
down  
Within fair orchards far from men and noise;  
A well the sun has never known, the birds  
Of Heaven have left unsullied by their beaks,  
And whither never shepherd boys have led  
Their herds of bulls with trampling feet. There I  
Will drink my fill of this inviolate draught,

And then some new song I will sing, a song  
Whose notes will be perhaps so very sweet  
That coming centuries will sing them yet.  
No robber, thieving from the poets old,  
My song shall be my own and mine alone :  
My song shall rise to Heaven by a new way,  
Singing the praise of Death that's still unsung."

With Genèvre Ronsard had reached the hard cynicism of the roué. He cared nothing for her and very little for her favours : he took them casually and then they parted. The dreams and aspirations of spring, the achievement and careless enjoyment of summer were over. She was the love of his wordly autumn. Ronsard was the Court Poet and intimate friend of Charles IX., who loaded him with pensions and benefices. He was the most celebrated poet in Europe, prior of Saint-Cosmes-lez-Tours and of Croixval (where you may see him in Pater's *Gaston de Latour*), Canon of Saint-Martin of Tours, Abbot of Bellozane and incumbent of many cures.

Ronsard met Genèvre bathing in the Seine. Next day he passed her door and stopped to talk to her. She asked him who he was and if he had loved other women. He answered : " I am Ronsard. That is enough." The whole incident and all that followed (save only this answer) are pedestrian enough : they lived together for a year and then parted most philosophically, by mutual agreement.

With his love for Hélène de Fonsèque Ronsard rose again and shook off the drag. But he could not put away the insistent sorrow. He loved Hélène truly. But he loved her hopelessly as an old man loves a young girl :

pretending that the bitter reality of an overwhelming and despairing love is but the pretty and precious trifling of a great poet playing at love-making with a child. Grey and racked with illness, he knew that he could not hope to inspire passion in this young beauty of the Court. Her love for him, genuine as far as it went, was partly sincere friendship, and for the rest a compound of affectionate pity and overweening pride at her magnificent conquest. Ronsard made the best of the situation: the Master acted his self-assumed part with brave dissimulation and she accepted his love as he gave it and not as he meant it, understanding of a poet's broken heart.

Another sorrow, too, had come upon him: Charles IX. had died:

" And they, alive or dead, torture with equal grief  
Whether of vain regret or still more hopeless tears,  
For indistinguishably love and death are one,"

a sonnet ends, referring to the living Helen and the dead Charles.

Soon, old and broken, Ronsard retired to his native country and his many priories. Charles' successor, Henry King of Poland, had no use for Ronsard: he already had his Court poet, the time-server Desportes, who had followed him to Warsaw and back. Moreover, Ronsard felt little sympathy for the worst of all the Kings of France. He was no flatterer of sovereignty. Finding Henry obdurate to his remonstrances, he dared urge the new Chancellor to disobey and rule well. "It is better," he said, "to lose the Sovereign's favour than be hissed by the people." Be-



fore he died Ronsard learnt bitterly to know that nothing could be hoped from the most Catholic Majesty of Henry III. and from his favourites and flatterers, and the old opponent of the Huguenots turned in despair toward the rising Protestantism of Henry of Bourbon-Vendôme, King of Navarre.

### III.

Enough attention has not been paid to the most notable work of Ronsard's autumn, the series of political poems inspired by the Wars of Religion. Up till 1550 the Protestant Reformation and the Renaissance had worked side by side. Margaret of Navarre and the School of Lyons had many points of contact with the Reformers. But by 1560, the opposition between the ideals of Calvin and those of the Renaissance was manifest. Calvin was, as the rebellious angel in M. Anatole France's latest novel puts it, a "*maniaque froidement furieux, hérétique brûleur d'hérétiques, le plus féroce ennemi des Grâces.*" There could be nothing in common between him and Ronsard. Protestantism was the enemy of the arts—iconoclastic and puritanic; and Ronsard's protest against Calvin and the new sect is the protest of Art against Puritanism. Catholicism stood for all that made life worth living. For Catholicism was still the Catholicism of the Italian Renaissance, the Catholicism we still find to-day in such writers as the French Barbey d'Aurévilly and the Spanish Valle Inclán, picturesque, passionate, and human. Therefore Ronsard went beyond his protector and exemplar, the Chancellor Michel de l'Hospital, from whom he borrowed many of his ideas. Michel de l'Hospital was the greatest statesman of

his day, devoted above all things to peace and freedom of conscience. He could afford to be just to the Huguenots. But Ronsard, though naturally moderate and tolerant, detested Calvinist puritanism too ardently to maintain the equable temper of de l'Hospital. Ronsard was not religious, de l'Hospital was. Being firmly convinced of the truth of Catholicism he could respect the sincere convictions of others. But Ronsard could not suspect that among the Calvinists there were really men whose whole being demanded a reasonable faith and whose convictions would not allow them to refrain from propaganda, even at the price of martyrdom. He did not and could not understand Protestantism. He was a Catholic by tradition and habit, and for him the claim of the Protestants was nothing but presumption and satanic pride. To go behind the authority of the Church, to oppose the recognised faith of his country were sin against God and crime against the State. And to presumption and sedition the Calvinists added iconoclasm, puritanism, and petty tyranny. The inquisitorial regime of Geneva with its censorship of morals and its "vigilance committees" that made all privacy impossible was utterly detestable to him. Asceticism and exaggerated austerity he could not tolerate. To defend the Catholicism of 1560, still untouched by the Counter-Reform, was to defend his own way of living and thinking, his whole attitude towards life, his Art, and the Paganism he held so dear. And, when by 1563 Civil War had already broken out and France was plunged, by the act of the Huguenots, into a cataclysm of blood and ravage, then the Catholic Church and its supporters stood in Ronsard's eyes

for peace and order and good government; and the Calvinists were rebels and fomenters of discord—a plague and curse upon France. The year of the two *Discourses on the miseries of this time* and of the second version of the *Elegy to Guillaume des Autels* was the year of the massacre of Passy, of the English seizure of Hâvre, Rouen and Dieppe, of the seige and fall of Rouen, of the Huguenot attempt upon Paris, and the Catholic victory of Dreux.

Ronsard's attitude towards life is well shown in his *Answer to some ministers and preachers of Geneva*, published in the spring of 1563, a reply to a number of Protestant libels. After reciting his *Credo*, that of the Catholic Church, he goes on to give an account of his way of life: "On waking in the morning, before doing anything, I call upon the Eternal, the Father of all good, praying Him humbly to give me His grace, and that the new day may pass without offence to Him . . . then I get up, and when I am dressed, I set myself to study. . . . For four or five hours I remain at work, composing or reading. . . . Then weary of too much reading, I leave my books and go to Church: when I come back, after an hour's pleasant conversation I dine soberly, and give thanks to God. The rest of the day I devote to amusement."

Then he tells of his amusements—walking, talking with a friend, reading or sleeping in a garden or by a stream, or playing tennis, wrestling, fencing, or even exchanging good stories with a gay companion, for, as he says,

"Too much austerity does not dwell in me."

Finally

"When brown night has set the stars arow,  
Encurtaining with veils the earth and sky,  
Careless I go to bed and raise my eyes  
And mouth and heart toward the vault of Heaven  
And make my prayer," . . .

That is his simple mode of life.

And then he compares the poet's love of beauty with the sullen fanaticism of the sectarian. He makes no secret of his love of fair women—seeing in it no wrong, provided it be decent and moderate, and he ends his poem with a picture of France ravaged and destroyed by Civil War and expresses his sorrow and indignation at all this waste and horror. But he does not forget, even in his anger, to do justice to the great Protestant family of Coligny—his friends and protectors, of whom he thinks no evil and to whom he attributes no ill desire toward the realm of France.

His earlier poems before the outbreak of Civil War had been singularly moderate. Here is a passage from the *Discourse to Des Autels* of 1560. He is speaking of the Huguenots:

"For they do wrong and we too are at fault;  
Their fault is wishing to destroy our realm  
And forcibly resist our sovereign's will,  
And in presumption of their proud self-will  
For ancient laws to substitute new dreams;  
Their fault is straying from their fathers' road,  
To follow ways of foreign sectaries;  
Their fault is scattering seditious prints,  
Slandrous and full of insult and contempt . . .

They think they only see, they only live  
Well ordered lives, while we have strayed from God  
To follow doctrine man-made and corrupt."

But then he immediately goes on to castigate the Catholic Church for its abuses—no Pope has preached since Gregory the Great, benefices are given to uneducated men, to boys of fifteen, fops, fools, and are sold to the highest bidder. He is particularly indignant at the young prelates who care nothing for their poor flock, "whose wool they take and often their skin too," and who live in profusion, idleness and debauchery. And he asks: What would Saint Paul say to find the Church "founded of old in humbleness of soul, in all patience and obedience, without money, consideration, strength or power, poor, naked, an outlaw——" what would he say to find it to-day "rich, well-fed and proud, well-provided with coin, revenues and lands, its ministers swollen with worldly wealth and its Popes even clothed in splendid vestments of silk and cloth of gold?"

And Ronsard replies:

"He would wish he had never suffered for the Church, never been beaten or stoned or banished for it." He urges the Catholics to reply to the Huguenots not with "cannon and armour" but by the pen, whereby they defend so well their bad cause, and which the Catholics as yet use so ill to defend theirs which is just and good. Ronsard evidently does not believe that an exhibition of force can prove the justice of any cause: for him the victories of the spirit can only be won by the spirit.

But when, in spite of de l'Hospital's efforts, seconded

by Ronsard, the Civil War had actually broken out, the poet changed his tone. He had to choose his side, actively now. He even fought for a while with the sword as well as the pen. He apostrophizes the Protestant de Bèze :

“ No longer preach in France a Gospel armed,  
A pistoled Christ, with powder-blackened face,  
And morioned head and bearing in his hand  
A broadsword, dripping with red human blood.”

He is convinced that the Protestants are responsible for the misery and disaster of the Civil War that is destroying France. He is filled with a great pity for the poor and humble who are paying the price of war and with a great indignation against the Huguenot disturbers of the peace. But even now he does not forget the abuses of the Catholic Church. In the *Remonstrance to the People of France* he adjures the prelates, assembled at the Council of Trent :

“ Root up ambition and excessive wealth,  
Tear from your hearts lascivious youth, and be  
Sober at meals and sober in all you say :  
And seek the welfare of your flocks and not  
Your own.”

And again :

“ Put off your greatness, glories, honours all ;  
Be clothed in virtue not in garb of sill,  
Be chaste of body, simple in your souls  
And humbly dignified among your flocks,  
Combining gentleness with gravity.  
Have no concern with worldly things, and flee  
The fickle favours of the Court of Kings.”

And Ronsard appeals to both sides in the name of God :

“ For Christ is not a God of quarrel or fight :  
Christ is just charity, concord and love.”

He even goes so far as to confess to the Protestants that “ Had they remained simple as of old and been content only to seek to reform the Church and put an end to the abuses of a greedy priesthood, he would have followed them, and would not have been the least of those who would have listened to them.”

Ronsard was soon to enter on the winter of his life. I shall not dwell on the bitter pæans of victory he wrote for the Catholic triumphs in the Third Civil War. For a moment, in exasperation, he forgot all his serenity and rejoiced in a spirit of exultation over the defeat of his enemies—a temporary lapse that we can readily forgive him when we remember the ruin that they had made of his beloved France and the hope he never lost that a crushing Catholic victory would put a speedy end to the horror that had engulfed his native land. In later years he returned to his old moderation and exhorted Henry III.—alas ! in vain—to justice and peace, and, in the long war that ended only with the accession of Henry IV., his sympathies were, not with the League and the Guises, but with Henry of Navarre.

But he did not live to see the victory of Henry IV. He died on the 27th December, 1585. He dictated two sonnets the day before he died. They are his own epitaph. Here is one of them :

"I am nothing but bones, I seem a skeleton, fleshless, nerveless, without muscles or heart beat, whom the shaft of death has struck without hope of remission. Apollo, god of medicine, and his son, Æsculapius, both great masters, cannot cure me, their skill has failed me; farewell, pleasant sun! my eye is blinded, my heart is about to go down where everything is disintegrated. What friend seeing me so stripped as this, does not carry back home a sad and humid eye, consoling me in my bed and kissing my face, and wiping my eyes put to sleep by death? Farewell, dear companions, farewell, my dear friends! I am going first to prepare a place for you."

He did not have his due: the little souls of Malherbe and Boileau libelled and besmirched him. Ronsard never deigned to be other than himself: he could proudly say whether to Genève or to Henry III., "I am Ronsard: that is enough." And he knew that the ladies of his verse, Cassandre, Marie, Genève, Hélène, despite their rich beauty, their fresh grace and charm of youth, would live only in his verse, and that the kings he honoured with his friendship were less than he was, and that their glory would only be that he had sung of them, as of the frail beauties who had loved him, with that immortal voice sounding across the centuries from the great Renaissance to our own huckster age.



#### IV.—THE POETS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.



KNOW a man who has an Eighteenth Century pastel on his wall over the mantelpiece of his room. On each side is a candlestick bearing a candle which he lights at dusk. He calls it his altar where forgetting the huckster world about him, he makes his offering to the leisurely and graceful Spirit of the Old Regime. He has made a copy of verses on his pastel, and here it is :

##### PASTEL.

"I lit the candles. Right and left they stand  
Of Boucher's pastel, and their golden flames  
Gave life to it. I saw the painted fan  
Rosy with Cupids on its ivory lames  
Swing with the motion of a shapely hand.  
A Cavalier in buckled shoes began

(Bent low with tricorn pointed to his toes),  
His protestations to a powdered Love.  
He wore a coat of gray and gold brocade  
And silken breeches and a vest of mauve,  
The night-breeze rustled her pannier of rose,  
And swaying hornbeams made their serenade.

I saw her close her fan coquettishly,  
And go with feigned reluctance down the grass,  
Between broad parterres edged with yellow box :  
And marble satyrs laughed to see them pass,  
And many a faun-chased nymph in verdigris  
Glinted between the painted hollyhocks.

Dim are her patches and her powdered hair,  
And dim the lace and buckles of her friend.  
The flowered gauze upon her silken skirt  
No longer breathes its faint and precious blend  
Of rose and essences and lavender.  
No lover now shall take the slightest hurt

From her cold breast or from her ivory cheek,  
The amber witchcraft of her eyes is still,  
The wine of heady kisses spilt : and he  
Who once had bent her to his lover's will,  
Has shed his gold brocade and musked perruque  
In the eternal night of Ninety-Three !”

That is the spirit of the Eighteenth Century. The poets of whom I shall speak, if they did not all shed their lives in Ninety-Three, at least all shed their brocade and powder and lost all that they held dear. If they survived, they lived on only as strangers in an ugly world, where breeches and wigs were forgotten. With the horrid yelp of the Carmagnole around them, they dreamed, like my friend, of that bright day when long ago they spoke with some powdered Beauty in the Gardens of the King, at Versailles or Saint-Germain, at Saint-Cloud or Marly-le-Roi.

The story of the Eighteenth Century is of the gradual

decline of the purely French school before English and German innovations. The Revolution and Romanticism are in Rousseau's *Confessions* and his *Contrat Social*. But they are just as much in Diderot's plays, and in his dramatic theory. Dancourt and Marivaux are French: Diderot and Beaumarchais are English. Richardson, Lillo and Edward Moore win the battle over the successors of Molière; Shakespeare beats Racine. Nature ceases to be the appropriate setting of well-ordered lives: she becomes a Prophetess with dishevelled hair and wild eyes, beckoning to an impossible Paradise. *Le Nôtre* is dispossessed by Kent. And the whole system of Louis XIV. in life and government decays and falls before the democratic ideas of England.

I do not propose to weary you with the cold and pompous writers of Odes, J. B. Rousseau, *Le Franc de Pompignan*, Houdar de la Motte, Lebrun and the rest. Even the best of them, J. B. Rousseau, is stiff and bristles with unnecessary mythology. *Pompignan* had, it is true, a lighter and even playful touch when he liked, but that was not often, unless he was discoursing to some fair lady of Nectar and Ambrosia, after some Italian model. Thomas was an honest man and dull to extinction. He is the Revolution in bad verse. His only, and that a more than dubious claim, is that *Lamartine* pilfered from him. *Le Brun*, known as *Pindar* by his admirers and enemies, is even duller, inspired no one but Victor Hugo at his worst, and was not even an honest man. It is they and their likes that have brought the Eighteenth Century into discredit. Nor do I propose to speak of the writers of the earlier part of the century. The Regency and the

years that immediately followed it are the decadence of the Seventeenth Century rather than the flower of the Eighteenth. The epicureans of Vendôme wore the full wig and plumed hat of the Seventeenth Century, and they knew not the deep blue velvet and powdered hair of Pompadour nor the diaphanous rose pink of frivolous bare-foot du Barry. Else had I fain dwelt lovingly on Guillaume Amfrye de Chaulieu, the millionaire intendant of the Princes of Vendôme, Abbot of Aumale, Poitiers, Chenel and Saint-Etienne, spiritual and temporal Lord of Saint Georges-en-l'Île d'Oléron, Voltaire's master and one of the most harmonious of French poets and a student of the theory of versification. And there are some of later days I have not in my heart to praise : Fontenelle, whose criticism is so much better than his prosaic verse where solemn shepherds make cold love to posturing shepherdesses : Piron who spent his last years, like Gresset, doing penitence for the work of his youth, and who is remembered only for a bad comedy, little better than Gresset's masterpiece, and without the redeeming pendant of the naughty story of Ver-Vert the pious parrot. "For Piron sleeps and Gresset is with God"—Piron s'endort, Gresset est tout en Dieu,—said Gentil-Bernard towards 1750. And there are dozens more : d'Arnauld, Dorat, Colardeau—I will not catalogue them. And of course I shall stop at 1789. With the Revolution Rousseau and Diderot came to their own, and David, in painting, brought the note of austerity proper to Republican virtue. With Marie Antoinette the gaiety and easy grace of the Eighteenth Century went to its death. Nor shall I speak of Voltaire, although the whole Eighteenth

Century is in him. Whether at Versailles or from Berlin or in his royal state at Ferney he dominates everything: his claim is not disputed. I wish rather to interest you, if I can, in the minor poets of the second half of the century, the Abbé Le Blanc, Cardinal Bernis, Gentil-Bernard, Saint-Lambert, the Abbé Delille, Leonard, the Chevalier Bertin and Evariste, Vicomte de Parny. They are little-known, perhaps, in spite of much perfunctory allusion to their insignificance, the least known of all French poets. No one reads Delille. Bertin, the best of them all, the author of one or two of the finest lyrics in French, is not even dismissed with contempt by Lanson. He is simply not mentioned. Le Blanc is not in the *Nouveau Larousse*, Bernis and Gentil-Bernard sell as *Erotica* to collectors who, if they ever read their first editions, will be grievously disappointed. Leonard has advanced to a cheap selection by an acknowledged authority: but I have editions not mentioned in his bibliography. Parny is only known because he was Lamartine's master, Saint-Lambert because he was Voltaire's rival in love. You can buy Delille for a penny on the quays. He was once famous: and he lived beyond the Revolution and profited by the cheap stereotypes and the sumptuous editions of the Empire. But Bertin is rare. He died with the Old Regime. He is best read in the two little morocco-bound Cazin volumes of 1785, and if you can find those in any penny dip, be gladder than if you had found the Lyrical Ballads or the first volume of Mr. Yeats. I would not sell mine for a ransom. For I say, advisedly, that if Delille is the purest and clearest of French poets since Racine, Bertin has softness and music and colour and passion

more than any before or since. Take the others if you will. Leave them to their undeserved oblivion, but give me these two, the classical and the exotic, for they sound between them the gamut of French verse. In Bertin, before Bernardin de Saint Pierre, before Chateaubriand, is all the heat of the South : and in him it is real : he is quite without pose or affectation, and quite without shame or self-consciousness. He is not steeped, like them, in the sentimentality and sophistries of Rousseau. He is a classic, not a Romantic.

They are all minor, it is true. But God whispers His truth to the drunken poet sleeping on the highway, as well as to Voltaire on the throne of thought or Chateaubriand on the ruins of the world. The great have not a monopoly of inspiration.

Perhaps the minor appeal to us more. They have dreamed our dreams and have desired and failed with us : their joys are such as we can share : their verse, with a little good fortune, we may hope to write. The Seventeenth Century is studded with immortal names. Even a minor poet, such as Père Lemoyne, writing his Epic of Saint Louis, felt himself the prophet and coadjutor of God. Voltaire spoke to God as to an equal. But the poets of whom I shall speak walked on dewy eves on dusk-enfolded lawns, or hid from mid-day under overarching trees, lords of nothing and caring to be lords of nothing but some elusive or some ready mistress, glad to rest with them in the shade of some cut spindle bower or on the soft turf of a statue-studded lawn. In the opening or falling of a rose they saw birth and doom : in the patches and powder of a panniered sweetheart the art of Michel

Angelo and Claude Lorrain. The Eighteenth Century is not devoid of poetry. The movement in painting of Watteau and his successors was bound to have its counterpart in verse. While the moralists sought salvation in sentimentality or in the grave wisdom of antiquity, the poets, heedless of doctrine, lived their own lives and sang their own emotions. Like Voltaire, they had learned wisdom from Ninon de l'Enclos, and had left morals to Rousseau howling in his Swiss desert and Diderot moved to tears at the spectacle of virtue rewarded. They lived and loved and sang and asked no more from the golden sunset of the old regime. They are not great poets, but they are true poets. They loved gardens and fair women and the delicate broidery of an artificial life. Their work is all in pastel-shades : there is no riot or profusion, but there is taste and refinement. Their feeling is no less real because it is gentlemanly in conception and expression, a touch or a hint sufficing where a Romantic would have exhausted the dictionary in violence and crudity. To them the world—their world—is a garden, carefully laid out by Le Nôtre, in beds and lawns and hornbeam avenues, every flower in its right place, blending colour and perfume exquisitely with the brocade and taffeta of comely Lords and Ladies, the spring or autumn tints of well-groomed trees and hedges, and noonday or sunset enveloping all in its appropriate rain of light. They loved Versailles and are its expression. Patched and powdered are the ladies of their verse : bewigged and musked themselves. Courtly priests, diplomatists and soldiers, they are before all gentlemen. They break the Decalogue with an easy grace and a laugh : there is no insistence :

their touch, even in their sins, is light. Far from them is the earnestness in virtue or in wrong-doing of a later day or of Rousseau and Diderot in their own. All was in the manner : nothing in the thing itself. Their love was much as love always is; but they loved without remorse or regret or self-analysis. And as they loved they lived their lives, of which love formed so great a part, without a backward glance or a fear for the future, excellently, courageously, like men of taste and honour, unshamed before the grandeurs and pride and great tradition of Versailles and unabashed in their respectful worship of Louis the Well-Beloved and Louis the Sixteenth. Outside, Rousseau and Diderot might howl and weep and the evening sky grow red with the torches of Revolution. But here, in Versailles, were peace and gracious gallantry and well-ordered repose.

I like to place them among the box borders and cut hedges of Versailles, mingling with the nymphs and fauns they understood so well on Le Nôtre's Parterre des Fleurs, or before the Labyrinth guarded by Esop and Love, or strolling through the innumerable Gods and Heroes of the Petit Parc or along the Great Avenue of the Cloth of Green—Bertin, in silk and gold with sword and plumes, with his Eucharis or his Catilie in flowered brocade of pale rose; Leonard with his Eglé or his Doris tricked out in the expensive rusticity of the shepherdesses he sang, with beribboned crooks and silken hose and high-heeled red shoes; Bernard with the bevy of the many ladies of his Epistles, going from one to the other in polygamous gallantry : Daphne, Claudine, Olympe, Corinne, Laure



and the rest, Delille, in the decent black of his profession, alone, with breviary half-opened in his hand. I like to think of the courtly Abbé walking towards evening in the hornbeam avenues between the formal lawns and beds with their fountains and statues and terms, and quincunxes of spindle and box, saluting fair ladies of the Court, bowing low to the minx du Barry or to Marie Antoinette as he dreams along his way in the glow of some summer evening. Not for him the perfumed cheek of an enshepherded Eglé. Bernis, his peccadillos forgotten in the purple of his Cardinalate, may pass them by unheeding, but Delille wistful of the impossible, sees too well the grace and frailty of these lights of love laughing on their gallants' arms or disconsolately awaiting their faithless lovers. Bertin and Leonard are almost exotic in languor, colour and voluptuousness. Delille is severely classical. His is the charm of perfect mastery and repose; theirs is the unconscious beauty of a great line thrown at random. He has looked and with severe control refused the proffered joy: theirs is the hotter passion of fulfilment. In Bertin the South breathes its enchanted desire: Leonard has, alas, read Gessner and Macpherson, and their northern mist clouds many a pagan noontide. Delille's besetting sin is characteristic of his cloth. He can write with the purity of Racine, but he cannot resist an exhibition of his encyclopædic knowledge. He does it decently, of course, not with the rankness of a Roucher or the cold science of Saint-Lambert. Yet when he should be whole-heartedly the mundane and slightly quixotic Confessor of frail brocaded ladies, his abominable Professorship will incontinently peer out amid the Fragonards and

Watteaus : he forgets his *Art of Love* and even his Breviary to perorate from his Chair in the *Collège de France*.

It is 1750. The lawns of the Orangerie, against the background of Mansard's Tuscan masterpiece, are gay among laurels and myrtles, with satin and velvet and brocade, beneath the more than life-size white marble statue of the Great Louis as a Roman Emperor. There is Boucher, in brown velvet, bowing low to Pompadour herself. He is her Court painter and the disciple of Watteau, Pater and Lancret. Young Baudouin, soon to be his son-in-law, is with him. There too, is, the chubby Abbé Bernis, Count of Lyons, the Court poet of the King's mistress. He, like no other, can pay a delicate compliment, make a dimple on a powdered cheek a perfect masterpiece of mannered verse, as fragile, as coloured, and as graceful as the work of the poets of the Roman decadence, Claudian or Rutilian. With him is Gentil-Bernard, his friend and Voltaire's, asking only in witty verse

"To please the fancy of great Pompadour."

He looks absurdly tall beside the little Abbé, who is like nothing so much as a Cupid in a Pompadour group, as he fusses along beside Bernard. In all the Salons of the time these two are found together, Bernis, the writer of madrigals, and Bernard, the famous author of an unpublished *Art of Love*. Everyone knows his *Epistle to Claudine* and his *Hymn to a Rose*, and remembered fragments of his masterpiece are on everyone's lips.

There too is Saint-Lambert, the poet of a few graceful and highly coloured lyrics, *Evening* and *Morning*,

and a couple of love poems to his Phyllis. He has newly returned to Paris from the death-bed of his mistress Madame du Châtelet, once Voltaire's friend. He has not read Thomson yet; nor written his *Seasons*. That big fat man is the Abbe Le Blanc, his historiographer of the Royal Palaces and preceptor to Pompadour's brother. He is a discreet admirer of English literature and institutions and has just published his *Letters on England*. But he is a poet too. His *Elegies* of 1734 are not yet quite forgotten.

Voltaire, from Berlin, where Frederick knows not Pompadour, dominates France. A year or two ago he had dominated Versailles, a lord-in-waiting, and the old and intimate friend of Pompadour.

Jean Jacques Rousseau is still unknown save for a few verses in the manner of the time, *Sylvia's Avenue* and such like. Diderot is known only as the author of an indecent novel.

It is 1770. Let us stand on the Great Terrace of Versailles by the four bronze statues of Silenus, Antinous, Apollo, and Bacchus, and watch those who pass up and down the grand perron between the vases of white marble and the bronze Loves horseback on marble Sphinxes. Du Barry reigns in pink and gossamer. That old man is Boucher, once Court Painter, now past his prime. Fragonard is with him, but Baudouin is dead. Gentil-Bernard is not there, though his *Art of Love* is still unpublished. He is an old man and insane now. Cardinal Bernis is Ambassador at Rome. You will not see him here. His worldly success has been complete, although he is an honest man. But instead of him you will see the young Chevalier Bertin in the full habillement of a

soldier, and his friend the Vicomte de Parny, a soldier too, both Creoles, both in the spring of life, one 18, the other 17, and convinced of the truth of Bernard's line :

" C'est à vingt ans qu'on à tous les plaisirs."

They at least, never were seen, nor will be,

" Près d'une belle assis nonchalamment."

There too is Léonard, the young diplomatist, a Creole like Bertin and Parny, soon to go on his mission to the Prince-Bishop of Liège. He has written his *Moral Idylls* and is famous. He is talking with the most illustrious poet of the time, the great Abbé Delille himself, the translator of Virgil's *Georgics*. They are discussing Thomson, Goldsmith and Gessner. For the literature of England and Germany is penetrating France. Young's *Night Thoughts* have just been translated and Ducis' adaptation of *Hamlet* is but a year old. And what is worse, J. J. Rousseau and Diderot have made some stir in France. Voltaire's royalty is waning at Ferney. Beaumarchais has written his *Eugénie*. The moral canvasses of Greuze, from the earlier *Paterfamilias* and *Village Bride*, to the later *Broken Pitcher* and *Dead Bird*, where the didactic intention is less obvious, but the suggestion of impropriety more blatant, have attracted much attention in the Salons from 1759 to 1776 and latterly in his own private exhibitions. Diderot delighted at the pathos of these sermons in oil has lauded Greuze to the skies at the expense of the far greater Boucher and Fragonard. Diderot does not understand reserve and repose : he mistakes the non-moral of the great painters

of the French school for the immoral, and is blind to the real immorality of Greuze's professedly moral sentimentalities. Greuze has a heavy touch : he insists. That Boucher never did, and Fragonard's eroticism is without offence and as light as air. For they are French, and Greuze is, like Diderot, a disciple of the English school. Saint-Lambert has become an Academician, and has adapted Thomson's *Seasons*. He, too, is turning to England. He has lost his lightness and grace. Gone, long since, are the days of Madame du Châtelet and the black eyes of Phyllis. Delille is talking to Bertin, who has said to him his latest poem, *Meridian* :

“ The sultry noon is still,  
The air is close and warm,  
My Catilie, where will  
You lie and rest to-day?  
The cloudy sky is red  
With lightning, and the storm  
Cannot be far away.  
Where shall we find our bed?”

To Delille's “ young scapegrace ” ! he has retorted by a reminder of a little piece of the Abbé's own written long ago and almost forgotten :

“ In some dim garden or dark wood  
Astray before the point of day  
I ask : why is she far away?  
Upon these velvet lawns we could  
Lie happily : or I could lead  
Her through some dusk-enfolded mead  
Or coppices at dawn bedewed !”

It is 1783. The War with England has ended in the Peace of Versailles. America is free and France victorious. The *Gardens* of Delille and the *Loves* of Bertin are full of the humbling of proud Albion then in process : now Louis is Conqueror and the Pax Gallicana is a balm upon the world. But, as of old Greece conquered Rome, so now England is victor at her victor's feet. The material gain is the spiritual loss.

Voltaire is dead and nemesis has overtaken him, for Ducis, the adaptor of Shakespeare, has succeeded him at the Academy, and Letourneur has published his complete prose translation of the Barbarian. Wild nature, sufficiently sophisticated to please Versailles, is the mood of the day. Ossian has been translated and Gessner. Bernardin de Saint Pierre is composing his *Studies* and *Paul and Virginia*. We had best cross the Park to Trianon. For at Petit Trianon, Marie Antoinette, a victim to Rousseau and Gessner, spends her days in rustic simplicity, a panniered and high-heeled dairymaid. Here are her farm-yard and orchard and vegetable garden, and her English Park. Quincunxes and cut box and yew are no longer the fashion : paths winding among forest trees and dewy lawns have taken the place of noble avenues, and Le Nôtre has fallen before Kent. It is the day of the Idyll. But thank Heaven, enough artificiality has remained in the cult of Nature. We need hardly regret the great manner of Pompadour nor the mincing frivolity of du Barry.

Boucher is dead, and Fragonard reigns in his stead : Bertin in paint. But the domesticities of the virtuous Madame Vigée-Lebrun are more to the Queen's taste,

Bertin has published his *Loves*, Léonard has returned from Liège. Parny has loved and lost Eléonore. Delille has long been Professor of Latin in the College of France and an Academician. He has just published his *Gardens* and is the most famous poet in the world. To come here he has crossed the clearing made by the devastation of 1775: saplings planted English-wise replace the great trees of the great time. And a passage of his *Gardens* runs in his mind:

“Versailles, alas! the lost charm of your woods  
 The master-work of Louis and the Gods.  
 Le Nôtre's craft is undone cruelly.  
 Those trees whose tops rose to the amber sky  
 Of sunset, now lie smitten by the axe,  
 And their once shady branches strew the tracks.  
 They shaded Louis' laurel-circled brow:  
 They saw the pride of Montespan laid low:  
 There sweet La Vallière to her Royal Lord,  
 Lovely and frail, scarce hoping her reward,  
 Whispered her timid secret fearfully.”

Besides, Roucher, a disciple of Rousseau, has dared to forestall his *Gardens* with a turgid, romantic poem of the *Months*, after Saint-Lambert and Thomson. It is true that it is of little account. The *Gardens* are gay and smiling in the sunshine of Delille's art. Roucher's poem is formless and threatening like a cloudy sky over weary uplands and deserted marshes.

Bertin is still a soldier and a courtier, but he is no longer twenty, and his dead Eucharis and faithless Catilie have left a note of melancholy in his voluptuousness. There is a plaintive undercurrent in some

of his last poems, written since the *Loves* were published a year or two ago.

"The shadows lengthen : hasten : why be wise?"

he cries to obdurate Catilie.

"For sweet illusion passes with young days  
And wisdom whispers low  
That I have seen the snows of thirty years."

He is reading to Delille a poem addressed to him. Both have in common, at least, a real love of Roman antiquity, even if the Abbé tends to Virgil and the soldier to Catullus. Delille is about to start for Italy and Bertin wishes that he too might see the ruins of that Rome

"Where Titus lived, the Darling of the World"  
"At Tibur, still, they say, on summer eves  
Horace, still rose-crowned, follows Lalage  
Who still escapes him on elusive feet."

Bertin is the last of the gay and care-free crowd : the last beautiful trifler of the Old Regime. He, to the end, ignored the storm without, the old order changing, Rousseau and Diderot howling, and Beauty and Comeliness dragged in the mire.

He saw, but refused to recognise the day when all he held dear should be forgotten and

"Beneath the share the lilies trampled be."



For the clouds are gathering. A year ago young André Chénier came back to Paris from his regiment at Strassburg, and is about to start for Italy. '89 is approaching, and the sun will go down on Versailles.

"The sun has set  
 Blood-red behind the trees. O butterflies  
 Now are your rouge and patches faded lies  
 And dulled your flowered brocade and sarsanet,  
 No longer may you greet in dainty guise  
 The powdered witty gallants that you met,  
 For on each hollow amorous enterprise  
 The sun has set.  
 No longer may grave abbés quite forget  
 Their breviaries—and be only wise  
 To read their graceful penitents' sweet eyes.  
 On Versailles and on Marie Antoinette  
 The sun has set" . . . .

## V.—LECONTE DE LISLE.

### I.



LECONTE DE LISLE was undoubtedly a great master of verse and, within a narrow range, a very great poet. His limitations are evident. He was not one of those whose

“ . . . feet hasten through a fairy field,  
Thither, where underneath the rainbow lurk  
Spirits of youth, and life, and gold, concealed.”

He missed nine-tenths of the world's meaning : he denied all virtue to the Middle Ages : he saw no beauty in a Gothic cathedral ; in gray cloisters and enclosed gardens ; in red roofs among the trees. He missed the more delicate and fragile side of things : the more intimate and subtle emotions : the eternal in the finite : the spirit informing all matter. His Gods are Gods of light and harmony : but their light is the crudeness of sun on white marble and their harmony has no place for the subtle and dangerous and penetrating chords of Debussy or Moussorgsky. His colour is gold and purple : without shading. There are no pastel effects : no blues and greens fading off into one another in the infinite cool variety of Nature. But he unflinchingly loved Justice and Freedom and repudiated with unswerving purpose all those who, in the

name of God or of the State, have restricted or attempted to restrict the free development of the individual : his inalienable right to freedom of conscience, thought and speech, and, within the measure made possible by human relations, of action. He followed and honoured Beauty and hated all those who blasphemed or denied her.

He refused to bend his knee to any Master high or low among the Kings of Earth or the Gods imagined in their image. Other Gods had lived, it is true, he believed, who had been each in his time, divine, and, as Louis Ménard said, "*les affirmations successives d'un besoin éternel.*" He cries not with joy but sorrowfully and pitifully : "*Te voilà donc blessé comme nous Galiléen, te voilà semblable à nous. Ta splendeur s'est s'éteinte et les lyres se sont tues,*" in the words put by James Darmesteter into the mouths of the Ancient Gods. And finally he asserted with the white heat of passion that Art has no purpose but itself, and refused to debase it to the purposes, high or low, of any propaganda whatever, whether of Truth or of the passing cant of the day.

## II.

Baudelaire in his article on Leconte de Lisle made an unwarrantable assertion and set a bad fashion. The former was to the effect that Leconte de Lisle's work did not betray his Creole origin : the latter was the fashion of singling out for praise the poet's descriptive verse. Leconte de Lisle owed to his birth and early life in Reunion not only his predilection for Greece and Greek life—"il aima dans Bourbon une terre grecque, la Grèce même"—his conception of the East

and his leaning towards Buddhism, and his love for the old Earth Gods and the Golden Age when, in some Edenic Bourbon,

"à l'aurore première  
La jeune Eve, sous les divins géroffiers "

walked in hope and innocence and joy, but—what is more fundamental still—the sensuous apperception of life which fills all his work : for he was not a profound thinker, and the burden of his criticism of his own day, of modern civilisation is

" Nous avons renié la volupté divine."

The increasing urgency, moreover, of his longing to steep himself in the oblivion of Nirvana, which counter-balanced and threatened to eclipse his pantheism and his hellenism was only possible to a mystic steeped in this sensuous Oriental quietism.

Leconte de Lisle's merely descriptive poems are not his best. The anthologies, British and German, are full of them. They may be dismissed : if Leconte de Lisle had not been more than a painter of dogs and elephants and condors, a Landseer in verse, he would have had no mention here. It is true that Leconte de Lisle is a master of description : but only when the description serves, instead of being, the main conception of the poem, as in the perfect *Le Manchy* which no praise can overvalue, one of the most exquisite elegies in French, the poet's tribute to the Creole lost-love of his youth : or in *L'Illusion suprême*, his nostalgic cry to the land of his birth.

I might praise his love-poems: for despite his restraint and reserve, the passion of Leconte de Lisle blazes from time to time in such lyrics as *Le Parfum Impérissable* and *Le Sacrifice*, and flashes through many other poems like lightning on a dark night over a troubled sea. But I prefer the exquisite Greek and Latī cameos in the *Poèmes Antiques* and the Eastern languor of *La Véranda* with their appeal of Art for and in itself, without the least suggestion of doctrine or intention other than such as a potter has in moulding the contour of a vase for some God to drink from. In them his passion for the form and colour and beauty, for the shapeliness and wonder of lovely material things glows like the love of a grown man for some radiantly lovely girl, like the touch of an artist's fingers on velvet or raw-silk, or the smell of a herb-garden on a sun-baked midday between enclosing walls. The air quivers with undying desire and the bright, young, beautiful Gods walk abroad in the eternal sunshine. Myriad formed they throng holding ambrosial cups to the reader's lips. He drinks the heavy opiate and forgets the clear light of the hills, the eyebright on the mountain meadows, and the coldness of a severe land, and sinks, willingly, intoxicated, numb, into the pantheistic dream of Leconte de Lisle, falling in adoration before the immanent Gods of his paganism, resting, divinely, on rose-leaf couches above an orderly and beautiful world.

### III.

I do not propose to dwell on Leconte de Lisle's political and social opinions. He had dreamed a dream of a well-ordered world in which each man and

woman would fulfil an appointed part. His State-Socialism does not appeal to me : we know what excesses of tyranny the pretext of the common good may cover. But in Leconte de Lisle's time the predominant conception of social and economic organization was individualistic. Darwin's theories of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest with, of course, an implication that the fittest were the best, were eagerly seized and twisted to justify the familiar processes of capitalism.

But to-day the predominant conception has altered. The masses are exploited in the name of a new shibboleth, the State. The ruling castes have changed their pretext : that is all. Individualism has been succeeded by "Prussianism."

Leconte de Lisle, protesting against an individualist regime, protested in the name of the Community : a Leconte de Lisle of to-day would assuredly protest in the name of the Individual against an organized State tyranny. He would repudiate the ideal of service, and say with Thoreau : "There is nothing so important to be done that I would not leave it to hear this locust sing." He would declare, with Royce, "Arise then, freeman, stand forth in thy world. It is God's world. It is also thine !"

Leconte de Lisle was what the practical man of to-day would call a futile idealist, an impracticable dreamer, a maker of Utopias.

We must remember, however, that the ideals, and dreams and Utopias of one generation become the accepted doctrines and social order of the next, the inviolable and imprescriptible truth in the name of which new dreamers and idealists and utopists are

persecuted, tortured and martyred. It is true that they have become in the process only empty husks void of all beauty and truth, as Christ's dream became the faith of Hildebrand, of Innocent the Great, of Alexander VI. and John XXIII., as the passionate individualism of the French Revolution became the liberty to exploit of industrialism, as the dreams of the Socialists have become the tyranny of State-Socialism. Men like Leconte de Lisle are Rebels against the Social order and accepted doctrine of the age in which they live : they are the leaven of the world, like the religions we profess but do not practice. But if once their ideas win and take a firm hold on the world, they lose interest in them. They cannot be on the side of the majority : for if once an idea has been accepted by the majority, it must have been wrested and twisted into some sordid and petty travesty, capable of universal appreciation. Leconte de Lisle found this out in the Revolution of 1848. He cast himself into that, young and enthusiastic, fired by high ideals and noble dreams. He soon found that the nation, ready enough to revolt, was not ready to carry out the ideas and dreams in the name of which it revolted.

" Je te dis que les masses sont stupides "—he wrote to Louis Ménard. " La grossièreté de leur sentiments, la platitude et la vulgarité de leurs idées " appalled him. He would give his life for his ideals : but he could not sacrifice his soul.

When the Third Republic ended in the tyranny of Louis-Napoléon, Leconte de Lisle ceased to take any part in politics. And he was wise and consistent. The part these Rebels play is that, like Qaïn or Niobé, of eternal and ever-recurring protest, in the name of

humanity and of God, against the self-sufficiency of established political, social, moral and economic tyrannies. They do not succeed. For spiritual ends cannot be won by material means. They fail and win by failure. They keep the light of the soul alive : their blood keeps red the sunset and the lilies are whiter and purer the way they have passed.

They are the blossoming of the race : dreamers, poets, teachers, saints and scholars. They withdraw cloistered from a crude age : or go forth carrying Beauty and the Idea like a torch, lighting an unwilling world and blazing in red splendour on their own martyrdom.

" O sang mystérieux, O splendide baptême,"

Leconte de Lisle cried in his *Vœu Suprême*,

" Puissé-je, aux cris hideux du vulgaire hébété

Entrer, ceint de ta pourpre, en mon éternité !"

Leconte de Lisle, unlike the Romantics, did not take his own emotions as the matter of his Art : he took Beauty, Legend and the clash of Races and their Gods—" les manières diverses," said Baudelaire, " suivant lesquelles l'homme a . . . adoré Dieu et cherché le beau." Leconte de Lisle regrets that Vigny, whom he admired as a true poet, had not been able to " se pénétrer à son gré des sentiments et des passions propres aux époques et aux races disparues." He has no individual heroes unless the monstrous and cynical Raven of *Le Corbeau* can be considered as one : but he too is little else than a mocking spectator of the history of the world, playing the part of a jeer-



ing Chorus in the ludicrous tragi-comedy of man's madness, an obscene counterpart of the noble Khirôn in the poem of that name. Hélène is the human race, struggling in vain against an overmastering destiny : Paris and Menelaus symbolize "la lutte de deux civilisations qui se sont disputé l'âme du monde," and her soul is their meeting place. Hypatie is Greece herself. The darkness closes upon her wonderful day. "Le vil Galiléen t'a frappée et maudite." Qaïn is mankind protesting against "Masters High and Low" : like Racine's *Athalie*, he cries his defiance to "le sinistre Iahvèh" :

"Ecrase-moi, sinon, jamais je ne ploierai."

In some of his earliest poems the Gods of Olympus are identified with the tyranny and oppression under which men suffer : Hélène, forced into the arms of her seducer, denies the deaf and cruel Gods to whom she has prayed in vain. In *Niobé* the Gods of Olympus are contrasted with the beneficent Earth Gods :—

the Giant Gods,  
Atlas, Hyperion, and him who took  
Clymene for his bride :

And Niobe predicts a day when they will come to their own and

"Zeus s'évanouira dans la Nuit inconnue."

Leconte de Lisle deifies Nature : protesting against the pseudo-Darwinian conception of Society he pro-

tests against the Huxleyan conception of Nature as the field of eternal struggle, of Nature

" red in tooth and claw  
With ravine . . . "

of Nature " careless of the single life." In *Dies Irae* he exclaims :

" Salut, oubli du monde et de la multitude !  
Reprends-nous, ô Nature, entre tes bras sacrés. "

He soon, however, revised his attitude to the Gods of Greece : they are

" Les divins Amis de la Race choisie  
Les Immortels subtils en qui coulait l'Ikhôr,  
Héroïsme, Beauté, Sagesse et Poésie,  
Autour du grand Kronide assis au Pavé d'Or. "

He sees in all the Gods that Man has made—" tous les Dieux morts, anciens songes de l'Homme "—the deified ideals, fears and passions of humanity; and these are the deified ideals of the noblest race that ever lived (even if it never lived, as Barrès suggests, outside his own and Louis Ménard's imagination !).

In a series of poems Leconte de Lisle has dealt with the first comings of Christianity and its clash with Greek, Finnish and Celtic ideals. *Le Runoïa* tells of the arrival in Finland of " le Roi des derniers temps," the last-born of the Gods. Christ tells Wainämöinen, the High God of the Finns, that his hour is come. " Art thou ready to die, King of the Pole ? " He asks. For the brave, strong barbarism of Finland has declined : she is ready to accept Christianity together

with the Russian yoke. He sums up his mission :—

“ I bring to man in terror of his sin  
Contempt for life and beauty and desire.”

“ Through Me,” He declares, “ man will deny his  
manhood . . .

The virgin curse her comeliness and grace  
and the wise

Torn by terrific doubt kneel with bent brows  
In shame,”

“ Honteux d’avoir vécu, honteux d’avoir pensé.”

The Old God protests, appealing to Nature ; but Christ  
retorts—

“ J’ai pris l’âme du monde et sa force et sa grâce,  
. . . La nature divine est morte sans retour.”

The minor Gods of the Finnish Pantheon ranged  
round their High God fell into Christ’s burning Hell :  
Wainämöinen himself, the eternal Runoïa, set sail in  
silence across the darkness of the Polar Sea into the  
Unknown, hurling a prophetic defiance at Christ :

“ Thou too wilt die ! ”

Here Christ is identified with the Mediæval Church,  
the object of Leconte de Lisle’s most violent and un-  
alterable hatred. But usually “ the last of all the  
Gods ” is treated with the utmost sympathy.

The figure “aux cheveux roux, d’ombre et de paix  
voilée” was to him the last of the bright young beauti-  
ful Gods of Greece : born out of his due time : a rebel,  
too, against established tradition and a martyr who

died to save the world from the self-complacent hypocrisy and the tyranny of Rome's blatant power. Even the old battered Raven who appears to Abbot Serapion in *Le Corbeau*, telling of the dead Christ on the Cross, is certain that He was more than a man.

"Celui-là n'était point uniquement un homme."

The obscene bird declares that he had never seen anyone so beautiful among all the Kings of Earth and the Gods :

" Il était jeune et beau, sa tête aux cheveux roux  
Dormait paisiblement sur l'épaule inclinée,  
Et, d'un mystérieux sourire illuminée,  
Sans regrets, sans orgueil, sans trouble et sans effort,  
Semblait se réjouir dans l'opprobre et la mort."

Leconte de Lisle loves the dream of "the young Essenian," as he calls him, but he recoils in abhorrence from the mediæval travesty of this dream. In the Mediæval Church, he thinks, one more God had died and been denied. He sees no hope : no new God will bring Love and Peace and Justice into this Hell of industrialism, into this war-ridden world of hate

"Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Christ remains our last and now forgotten God. In *La Paix des Dieux*

"Le blond Nazaréén, Christ, le Fils de la Vierge,"

appears as the last of all the Gods, immediately after the Gods of Greece. In *Le Nazaréén*, Leconte de Lisle apostrophises Him :

"In ruined Churches Thou can'st hear and see  
High orgy of the impious herd, flower girt  
And wan, run riot, and its laughter mock  
In obscene insult Thy divine distress!  
Thou sittest now between Thine Ancient Peers  
With russet head against a pure blue sky;  
And souls like swarms of mystic doves fly up,  
To drink the divine dew at Thy God's lips.  
As in the haughtiest days of Roman Power,  
So in this sinking and rebellious world  
Thou hast not lied while mankind shall endure,  
Weeping in time and in eternity!"

## V.

In the awful series of mediæval poems, the Church is the Church of the Inquisition, of the stake, of persecution and torture. It is

"la Goule

Romaine, ce vampire ivre de sang humain,"

and the pale figure of Christ appears only to reproach some dying Pope with his excesses:

"Regarde! mon royaume est plein de tes victimes!"

I will not dwell on this aspect of Leconte de Lisle's work. He did not understand the Middle Ages: the great work of the Church is obscured by the smoke of the holocaust, the sky of faith lighted only by the "reflet sanglant des bûchers." *Les Etats du Diable*, *la Bête Ecarlate*, *Hiéronymus*, and the rest are, to me, intensely displeasing. Their violence sins against the restraint of art: their prejudice is unworthy of a great poet. In these centuries of "égorgeurs, de lâches et

de brutes " others, no less great than Leconte de Lisle, have seen the highest effort and attainment of humanity: the Dark Ages for them have shone with exceeding splendour and Saint Thomas Aquinas has been a new Aristotle. Leconte de Lisle could see nothing of value between the fall of Rome and the dawn of the Renaissance. "Tout ce qui constitue l'art, la morale, et la science était mort avec le Polythéisme. Tout a revécu à sa renaissance. . . En même temps que l'Aphrodite Anadyomène du Corrège sort pour la seconde fois de la mer, le sentiment de la dignité humaine, véritable base de la morale antique, entre en lutte contre le principe hiératique et féodal." That is the explanation of his hatred of the Middle Ages. The joys and splendours and beauties and virility of the old doctrines and the old life were dead: and the new intensity did not compensate him for the loss of the wide horizons of the pagan world. He could not forgive Christianity for having made little of Brother Ass the Body. He would have "le souffle de Platon dans le corps d'Aphrodite." He could see no virtue in renunciation: could not extract beauty from sorrow and sacrifice. Desire not Love was his ideal: and Christ had given Love to a sick world, weary of Carnal Beauty and the Desire of the Flesh.

## VI.

Leconte de Lisle regarded his own epoch with scarce less disfavour than the Middle Ages.

"Oh! que ne suis-je né dans le saint Archipel  
Aux siècles glorieux. . . ?"

he asks in his *Vénus de Milo*.

The harmony of Greek life is no more : " Sleep," he calls to Hypatia, the victim of Cyril and his horde of monks,

" Dors ! l'impure laideur est la reine du monde,  
Et nous avons perdu le chemin de Paros !"

All minds are occupied, he declares in his article on Béranger, with "la fièvre de l'utile, les convoitises d'argent" and regard the Ideal with contempt or at best indifference. "Les imaginations s'éteignent, . . . les suprêmes pressentiments du Beau se dissipent." And in his article on Baudelaire, he naively enough, I suppose on the well-known principle that the nearest enemy is the worst, singles out France for especial abuse as a "nation routinière et prude, ennemie née de l'art et de la poésie, déiste, grivoise et moraliste, fort ignare et vaniteuse au suprême degré."

His poems on modern civilisation are not his best : like most of the mediæval series they sin against his own canon of art : they show a hatred and contempt too violent to be repressed even in the cause of that Art to which he remained faithful like Vigny, "absorbé par la contemplation des choses impérissables, et qui s'est endormi fidèle à la religion du Beau."

It may, indeed, be true that

" L'idole au ventre d'or, le Moloch affamé  
S'assied, la pourpre au dos, sur la terre avilie,"

but the form of statement suggests a Socialist tract.

In the same poem, *Anathème*, however are some of the loveliest verses in all his works.

" Nous avons renié la passion divine "

he cries in his despair.

" Pour quel dieu désormais brûler l'orge et le sel ?  
Sur quel autel détruit verser les vins mystiques ? "

he asks, in words of infinite beauty.

But he knows no hope. Never more will the slave of machinery judge his activities by the standard of beauty : the practical man has won and all that makes life worth living is lost beyond recall. And so he calls upon a new deluge to engulf a futile and an ugly world.

Thus we leave the hollow splendour of Leconte de Lisle : he looked at God and Love and Death through the smoked glass and pestilential fumes of mid-century materialism and agnosticism, and the incredulity and foulness of his hopelessly corrupt and selfish epoch blinded him to the hope and glory that shone upon his path. He looked backward to a dead beauty that he could not bring to life again, and died bowed before a memory, when before him, had he only eyes to see, Beauty immortal walked the Earth, as of old, and the Soul of Man blazed its imprescriptible way despite Kings and Priests to the Heaven of the " steep and trifid God " he denied.



## VI.—PAUL VERLAINE.



THE individuality of Paul Verlaine is that of a perverted Pierrot, a "velvet-footed" dancer in the Carnival of Art, whose soul was held in thrall, not by the pale inconstant loveliness of the moon, but by the baleful and malignant influence of Saturn's dangerous beauty. His melancholy is the melancholy of such a Pierrot. He knew only too well his utter lack of will, knew that he was by nature a feather on the wind, blown this way and that by every little breeze of desire. He could not to his life's end realise that the apparently gorgeous-coloured butterflies of self-indulgence and sensuality that he chased so gloriously and joyously in the day time were in reality only little handfuls of grey dust over which he would miserably weep during the long sad night.

In him

"L'imagination inquiète et débile  
Vient rendre nul. . . l'effort de la raison."

Further on in this same poem, he says of mortals having the ill fortune to be born under Saturn

"Tels les Saturniens doivent souffrir et tels  
Mourir,—en admettant que nous soyons mortels,  
Leur plan de vie étant dessiné ligne à ligne  
Par la logique d'une influence maligne."

Only one thing could have helped him to fight against this "influence maligne," and this was a woman's subtle and understanding friendship-love. For him Eros of the bandaged eyes held no divinity. He needed a lover who possessed the wise peace-giving qualities he was to attribute to, and find later in his "Mère Marie," and who, at the same time would give him the companionship of sympathetic intellectual feeling; who was in fact a comrade soul understanding and helping the psychological complexity of his own spirit. In his youth his cousin Elisa watched over him lovingly until she died, and her memory is one of the most beautiful things in an existence in which there were all too few beautiful memories of women. She was like a mediæval saint, but had none of a mediæval saint's rigidity, recognising the wayward loveliness and extraordinary genius of Verlaine. She paid for the publication of his first book of poems.

At a most critical point in his life, when the lure of Bohemia seemed most fascinating to him, and when the evil green viper, absinthe, had already begun to feed on his soul, he fell in love for the first time and married Mathilde Mauté de Fleurville, who after a few months of romantic illusion about her husband, became a second Ophelia to this sorely-tempted and temporarily maddened Hamlet of the *Quartier*. Like the Prince of Denmark he had his Horatio. Lepelletier gave him as strong a loyalty and affectionate friendship as man can give man, and was a square tower of sanity always ready to shelter and console. But both Hamlet and Verlaine needed more than Horatio. A woman like Brutus' Portia might have saved either.

Certainly neither Ophelia of the stupid, gentle fawn-like temperament, nor Mathilde with her essentially limited bourgeois outlook, could help their lovers in the slightest.

Understanding love, this is what "le pauvre Lélian" wept for and sought after, all through his life. It is true that he found much sympathy among temperamentally feminine men, but Rimbaud was "son mauvais génie," and ultimately played him false, and Lucien Létinois died after a few months friendship.

It is this intense need of a love that will not return upon itself that makes Verlaine turn to Christ's Virgin Mother—the Rosa Mystica in whom he found all the qualities he looked for in vain in his cruelly dense child-wife and his many "amies" of later life—and crouch like a weary child beneath her wondrous blue mantle.

In his wistful penitent moods he loathes sensuality, the terrible beast that would clutch and tear his immortal spirit with its ugly claws and over which he has so little control, and woman was never so divine to him as when her animal nature was latent and all her gentle flower-like qualities in evidence. "L'amante," he says, "doit avoir l'abandon paisible de la soeur."

He sought only too often the Infinite in the Finite—by bitterly bought experience learning that he could find no mortal woman to give him what he desired, and only in the Turris Eburnea, shadowed by the wonderful blue half-lights of the Catholic faith could the poor out-worn pilgrim find rest for his tired and dust-stained soul

Verlaine kneeling before the altar is unfortunately all too often succeeded by Verlaine wallowing in the lowest depths of debauchery and even crime. He is his own "Pierrot gamin."

"Créature toujours prête  
A souler chaque appétit."

As he grew older the charming *gaminerie* so delightful in Pierrot young became a hard and bitter cynicism and knowledge of his own utter failure. It is the Pierrot of this period who sadly sings the *Sérénade* so terrible in its inevitability—the song of one who knows so well that satisfied desire will eventually kill his soul and yet who cannot save himself even if he will. It is this Pierrot who sighs in *Spleen* :

"Du houx à la feuille vernie  
Et du luisant buis je suis las  
Et de la campagne infinie  
Et de tout, fors de vous, hélas !"

In his old age he is the Pierrot of *Jadis et Naguère*, a morbid and hollow-eyed caricature of his real self :

"Now is the moon-struck dreamer vanished quite,  
He who looked down in painted mimicry  
From o'er their stately doors and mockingly  
Laughed at our ancestors. Alas ! that bright  
Flame-dancing mirth like his poor candle's light  
Is dead. To-day we glimpse him shadowy  
And spectre-thin. His mouth gapes mournfully  
As if he wept beneath the worm's cruel rite.

His tunic floats out shroud-like on the cold  
Night-wind, its white sleeves rustling fold on fold  
Like passing birds seem aimlessly to trace  
Vague signs that beckon to the world in vain. . . .  
His sunken eyes' cold phosphorescent pain  
Shines in the deathly pallor of his face."

Last and saddest stage of all, nothing to hope for now, save the final torture of Death. Yet the "fauve planète" did not entirely conquer its unfortunate victim, and although his work might have been greater if everything in his life had not conspired so effectively to hurry him to the worst of which he was capable, he has left behind him some of the finest lyrics in the French language, one volume of which at least may be placed beside the *Odes* of Ronsard and the best of Alfred de Musset.

His verse is more akin to music than to poetry. He is able with words to express the most subtle and scarcely perceptible moods of both external nature and his own extremely mobile temperament; moods that treated by any of his Parnassian predecessors would have been like faded and torn butterflies crushed beneath heavy jewelled chains of rhetoric. In his hands words became flexible, harmonious, plastic, each one of them an Ariel to his Prospero. Not for him the pompous eloquence of a Hugo, nor the carved and enamelled effects of Gautier and Banville, beautiful though they were. He did not work in precious stones, but in the most delicate shades of colour imaginable, colours that are shadows of colours even as a soft grey-blue and silver twilight

is the shadow of a radiant spring day of green and gold.

He, too, knew Whistler's secret of impressions rather than clear-cut outlines, and in many of his best poems, lyrics such as the famous "La lune blanche luit dans les bois" and *Romances sans Paroles*, the words and rhythm combine imperceptibly with each other to leave in the reader's soul emotions as delicately ephemeral and vaguely elusive as those left by the melodies of a Moussorgsky or a Ravel. In this "subtle inevitability of skilful pastelizing" lies the power of Paul Verlaine. By it he not only avoids the "impassivity" of the Parnassians, as I have said, but also by a certain skill and clearness does not fall into the horror of incoherency of his followers the symbolists. An eminent critic has likened him to "a butterfly tired of the materialism of cosmos, but hesitating on the brink of the dull, aimless disorder of chaos."

With Verlaine more than with most poets the man and his work are inextricably bound up. His poems are always "the instantaneous notation of himself." *Poèmes Saturniens* is the most objective of all his books as opposed to the intense subjectivity of the average beginner's early work, which may or may not develop into later objectivity. Although young when he wrote this, his first volume, even then he realised the extreme importance of form, with which his absorption of *Emaux et Camées* and the work of Banville and Baudelaire had much to do, and in these poems perfection of metrical structure combines with a certain youthfulness and freshness of feeling, not untouched by the essential melancholy trend of his tem-

perament. Woman is still an ideal to him, a goddess in whose cool hands lies all wisdom and understanding. Nature is wonderful and mysterious to Verlaine always, but in *Paysages Tristes* he draws her in her most elusively subtle moods. With what lucidity and precision he expresses the most exquisite sensations, mystical correspondences and mental affinities! With what marvellous craftsmanship he recaptures an autumn twilight in *L'heure du Berger*!

“ On the horizon through a mist-wov'n veil  
The moon hangs glowing red : a quivering haze  
Shrouds drowsy meadows; through the sedges  
    plays  
A little breeze bearing a frog's thin wail.

“ Now the pale water-lily closèd lies,  
And the slim ranks of distant poplars seem  
Arboreal ghosts seen vaguely as in dream,  
And flickering round the bushes flit fire-flies.

“ Now bats awake—circling in noiseless flight  
They beat the darkness with strong leathern wings,  
While Venus, clad in skiey glimmerings,  
Glides forth, the dazzling courier of Night.”

Every mood of nature is seen through the mood of his own temperament. In *Promenade Sentimentale* it is “de grands nénuphars parmi les roseaux” gleaming palely in the dusk that seem to respond to him, symbols of a spiritual hope almost lost beneath the enshrouding veils of the night of the soul's melancholy; and in *Chanson d'Automne* the

"languorous and long" sobbing of the violins seems played on the too sensitive strings of his own personality.

Again in the deliciously Watteauesque *Nuit de Walpurgis Classique* the poet asks if these dancing wraiths, these "formes diaphanes" of his favourite century

" . . . Sont-ce donc la pensée  
Du poète ivre, ou son regret, ou son remords  
Ces spectres agités en tourbe cadencée?

Sont-ce donc, ton remords, ô rêveur qu'invite  
L'horreur, ou ton regret, ou ta pensée? . . ."

In his second book of poems, *Fêtes Galantes*, the muse of Verlaine no longer bears the semblance of a slim changeling girl, daughter of the dawn and dusk, stealthily stealing through autumn woods like a dryad listening to the songs of the falling leaves, or like a naiad watching the wind ruffling the silver surface of some still, twilight-veiled lake; but masked and rouged dances softly through the gardens of Versailles, sometimes pausing behind the high yew hedges to overhear a conversation between Harlequin and Columbine, sometimes halting behind a bronze satyr's pedestal to see a great lady rustling past, stiff in satin and jewelled brocade followed by her little negro page, as in *Cortège*; and often at night when the gardens are lit with Chinese lanterns, those "coloured pasquins of the moon," sitting amid the dark sapphire shadows of some spindle bower weeping at the heart-rending sadness behind all the surface gaiety of this gorgeously artificial carnival. The inspiration of these poems is, as I have said, utterly different from that of *Poèmes*



*Saturniens*. Mr. Edmond Lepelletier accounts for the extraordinary influence of the Eighteenth Century on the poet at this time by two contemporary events: firstly, the publishing of some literary studies by the *Concours* on that century; and secondly, the opening of the *Galerie La Caze* to the public. This collection of pictures contained works of Fragonard, Nattier, Watteau, and many other artists of their school, and it is not unlikely that Verlaine's frequent visits there gave him the idea of painting in words and metre "les personnages de Boucher, dans les décors de Watteau."

If in *Sagesse* Verlaine approaches nearest to being a great poet appreciated and acknowledged by the many, in *Fêtes Galantes* he is the delicate-fingered painter of miniatures in pastels adored by the few. In these twenty-two or twenty-three lyrics we find the Versailles of Louis XV. in its entirety, its delicate butterfly beauty and frivolity, its patched and powdered daintiness, its underlying sensuality and putrescence, and above all its charm—the charm of decaying beauty, of autumn, the season that recurs again and again in the verse of Verlaine.

"Le soir tombait, un soir équivoque d'automne :  
Les belles, se pendant rêveuses à nos bras  
Dirent alors des mots si spécieux, tout bas  
Que notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et  
s'étonne."

Here is all the wistfulness of autumn, the soft minor violin note of the poet's subjective vision, his mode of projecting his own temperament into a poem that

would otherwise entirely recapture the spirit of Eighteenth Century lyricism. That perfect little poem, *Amour par Terre*, is impregnated with the same vague sadness—a mournfulness that seems to veil so lightly the weary soul's desire for the Infinite. In *Le Faune*, too, beneath its apparently "carpe diem" subject there is the same restlessness of spirit.

" An aged faun maliciously  
Poised terra-cotta o'er the green  
Lawns, laughs as if he can foresee  
Ill-followers of these serene  
Moments that led us trustfully  
(As we had sad-eyed pilgrims been),  
To this hour that elusively  
Whirls to a distant tambourine."

How different is this to the real paganism of Bertin and Parny, who saw beauty and perfect joy in the fragile glass of golden wine held in a be-ruffled ivory-fingered hand, and death and eternity in the crushing of a daisy beneath the red heel of the mistress of the moment! This decadent note of modernity is, however, so successfully concealed in some of the poems beneath an apparent objectivity that the girl in *L'allée* seems to be a Francois Boucher to the life—one of the Pompadour's ladies-in-waiting, doubtless, a perfect example of her type,

" Like a rouged heroine in a pastoral  
Fragile beneath great ribbon knots, she goes  
Along the alley, 'neath the branches' shade  
By old grey, moss-grown seats . . . Affectedly

She gestures in a thousand conscious ways  
As if she played with some pet parakeet.  
Her long brocaded train is blue. Her fan  
(Held lightly in her slender fingers, gemmed  
With heavy jewels) a pastel fantasy  
Of strange vague-shadowed dreams at which she  
smiles.

A gold-haired child—with delicate nose, and  
mouth  
Crimson and pouting in unconscious scorn . . .  
She is more dainty than the patch that makes  
More bright her sparkling eyes vapidly."

And what could be more like a Watteau symphony  
in silver and blue and rose than *Mandoline* :

"Here, beneath the sighing leaves,  
Serenaders softly play  
Faded airs to lovely thieves  
Who have stolen their hearts away.

Here's Aminta and Tircis  
With Clitandre, the evergreen;  
Here's the pleading-voiced Damis  
Teased by many a cruel queen.

Silken coats that brilliantly  
Flash, long trains of flowered brocades,  
Patched and powdered gaiety,  
Dancing azure-stained shades.

Whirled in dainty madness these  
Flit 'twixt rose and grey moonbeams,  
Towards them on an errant breeze  
Float the mandolines' faint dreams."

*La Bonne Chanson* is composed of poems written to his wife before marriage. It is a transition from objective descriptive plastic verse to personal expression, the confessions of the soul; and the substitution of one method of art for another, as the result of feeling, loving and suffering. All his best qualities, subtlety, tenderness, harmony and delicacy of form unite to make these "occasional verses," a wreath of sun-kissed wind-flowers for the brown-gold hair of his beloved—a necklace of moonbeam-lit jewels for her ivory neck.

As I have said, Verlaine's work was always the victim of the vicissitudes through which its author was passing, and when he wrote these poems circumstances combined to bring out the best that was in him. He loved and was loved, for as yet no misunderstanding had arisen between him and his mistress. He had given up absinthe, the "atrocious green sorceress," whose wiles were eventually to wreck his character and turn his childlike *naïveté* and tenderness into cynicism and brutality, qualities that are only too evident in *Jadis et Naguère* and *Parallèlement*, although both these books contain many fine poems.

*Sagesse*, his greatest book, and one of the greatest books of religious verse in the world, was written after his conversion in prison at Mons.

Verlaine was one of those who entered the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child, and his mysticism has all the charming simplicity and unconsciousness of a child's religion. That Christ and the Immaculate Virgin are very real personal entities to him is obvious to anyone reading the sonnet cycle beginning "Mon

Dieu m'a dit, Mon fils, il faut m'aimer," or that beautiful poem, "Je ne veux plus aimer que ma Mère Marie."

This book is full of a serene and quiet beauty which is not confined to the obviously religious poems. Verlaine had become ruler of the best in his own soul during those prison years, and every lyric in *Sagesse*, whatever its subject, is touched with the flaming white light of his ecstatic communion with his new-found God.

Poems such as "Le ciel est pardessus le toit" and "Un grand sommeil noir," are only rivalled in tender musical beauty by the verse of Dowson.\*

Huysmans has said that Verlaine "was truly himself only in hospital and in prison." The four grey walls of his cell had protected him and helped him to forget the terrible devils that lay in wait for his soul as soon as he resumed his old life, and against which he seemed quite incapable of fighting, his sword of will-power, once bright and sharpened by Love, being now dull and blunted and useless. All that remained to him was a sorrowful memory of the possibilities of his own tormented soul.

*Sagesse* was his last great work, although *Jadis et Naguère* contains many sonnets and poems of great beauty, elevated philosophy and superb workmanship. There are in this book poems written in accordance with each of Verlaine's styles, and some "A la manière de plusieurs," obviously much influ-

\* Dowson too believed in Verlaine's credo "De la musique avant toute chose" and translated much of his master's work with the sensitiveness that only an artistic temperament of the same psychological family as Verlaine's could achieve.

enced by Hugo, Leconte de Lisle and others. Included in it there is a little play, *Les Uns et les Autres*, a poetic and graceful lover's quarrel, "like an echo of De Musset and Molière, set in a scene by Banville," a *fête galante* adapted for the stage.

He wrote a great deal in his old age, but most of his late work is of no account, being discoloured by a dull and mediocre obscenity. His greatest poem, *Parsifal*, which seems to me to epitomise all that "le Pauvre Lélian" aspired to be, the star of stars of which he never quite lost sight.

"Parsifal a vaincu les Filles, leur gentil  
Babil, et la luxure amusante—et sa pente  
Vers la Chair de garçon vierge que cela tente  
D'aimer les seins légers, et ce gentil babil;  
Il a vaincu la Femme belle, an cœur subtil,  
Etalant ses bras frais et sa gorge excitante;  
Il a vaincu l'Enfer et rentré sons la tente  
Avec un lourd trophée à son bras puéril,

"Avec la lance qui perça le Flanc suprême !  
Il a guéri le roi, le voici roi lui-même,  
Et prêtre du très-saint Trésor essentiel.  
En robe d'or, il adore, gloire et symbole,  
Le vase pur où resplendit le sang réel  
—Et, ô ces voix d'enfants chantant dans le  
coupole ! "

## VII.—STUART MERRILL.

### I.



HE early work of Stuart Merrill belongs to the Decadence. It is infinitely precious, arabesqued and filigreed excessively: overwrought with rare ornament: set with unwonted jewels. *Fête au Parc* and *Fin de Fête* in *Les Gammes* have a wistful tenderness: all Versailles dies in them and lives its tragic dream-life of dimly-remembered loves. *Les Gammes* proceed from Verlaine's *Fêtes Galantes* and lead to Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac's *Perles Rouges*, and Henri de Regnier's *Cité des Eaux*. Only Merrill, Montesquiou-Fezensac and Regnier, after Verlaine, have rendered the peculiar charm of Versailles—autumn evenings heavy with dangerous memories of exquisite follies and sins become attractive in the faint aroma they have left. These pæonies bleeding in the coppered sunset, these hollyhocks screening the amber sky along avenues where once walked the dainty carnival of forbidden loves, need a Decadent to catch their troubled secret and sip, drop by drop, the perilous wine of their rare vintage. In *Les Fastes*, Merrill, like Louis II. of Bavaria, flees

“ Down strange paths lit by an inner moon.”

He rides the insurgent hippogriffs of Moreau's paintings, and hears the wild gallop of the Valkyries across the mad sky of Wagner's music.

"Le Centaure au poil rouge et la Licorne blanche" clash in heraldic combat in the lists of some faun-haunted forest, and strange nightmares brood on the troubled sleep of a King dethroned. *Les Petits Poèmes d'Automne* are exquisite with the sorrowful music of love hopeless and the too red roses of desire, past joy and peace that cannot come.

The poet has plucked from laden trees, holding out their too delightful fruit, the pomegranates and nectarines of dream and desire. He has drunk the aphrodisiac wine: and Love is poisoned. Thought and will are plunged in narcotic sleep.

## II.

The early Merrill is decadent. But that is a statement of attitude, not a criticism.

For why should not a man walk on bye-paths if he will? God whispers the truth to the dreamer by the sedge-girt pools equally with the pioneer marching head-high to victory. One man will sail the seas, another will row leisurely up some forgotten or undiscovered creek. Why should we not cultivate a garden, exquisite with fragrant and delicate bloom, if we cannot fell trees in some virgin forest?

There are moments when it is well that a poet, if it be not his province to seek out the intensity of life in the very places of death and disease, turning darkness into light, and casting a glory of beauty over the turmoil of our cities, should look in his own soul and find in the dreams born within it some compensation and redemption for the corruption of a shallow and a hollow world, and averting his eyes from our shame,



recall us to our destiny and bring us into harmony with eternal things.

One poet will take the obvious world of lust and fraud and shame we live in, and shake from its murky folds and wrappings of horror and dismay a golden rain of truth and beauty, seeing God (as James Stephens did) in a charwoman's daughter and eternity in a policeman's uplifted hand. But another will go with his lady beneath the trembling poplars, and in her laughing or her dreaming eyes, her face upturned, her white brow and aureole of hair, he will catch the colour of the fields of heaven and reflections of the infinite beauty unbeheld by any eye; and from the grass trodden by her white feet, gleaming in the dawn, he will gather the dew of everlasting truth. And which is the greater thing to do? To speak with God upon the highway or to surprise His hidden secrets in a laugh or a sigh or the rustle of an aspen in the night?

Decadence is more an attitude than a school: Symons, Dowson, and Rachel Annand-Taylor have the attitude: but it became almost a school in the eighties and nineties in France under the influence of Mallarmé, "le poète las que la vie étiole," who lost in over-subtleties of emotion and expression, achieved nothing but a few disturbing lyrics and a few tortured pages of prose distilling a rare and insidious poison. Baudelaire was accepted as a forerunner. Villiers de l'Isle Adam was hailed as a master: the cynical and contemptuous aristocrat who aspired to the throne of Greece and wrote *Tribulat Bonhomet*, the *Ubu Roi* of his time, in which the Gouliards and Lanternois of the Eighties were held up to everlasting

scorn. The "poètes maudits" were adopted: Corbière, drunken with bizarre beauty, blending the obscenities of Montmartre and the forecastle in a torrent of clumsy paradox, through which flash the lightnings of a tipsy splendour: Rimbaud, Verlaine's evil genius, brutal, violent, sensual, in whose few poems "d'une qualité peu commune d'infamie et de blasphème" his unrestrained passions were expressed before he found his life-work as a slave-dealer in Africa and the East: "un Stendhal déséquilibré, méchant et féroce." The minor poets of the Decadence took all this seriously: and their work is a welter of strange passions and strange sins, of "la luxure de l'esprit et l'intellectualisme de la passion."

Verlaine's most famous sonnet

"Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la Décadence . . ."

which was at most the expression of a mood, was made the emblem of a school, and nature became an eternal "après-midi de septembre, chaude et triste, épandant sa jaune mélancolie sur l'apathie fauve d'un paysage languissant de maturité." "J'aime le mot de décadence," he was reported to have said, "tout miroitant de pourpres et d'ors . . . Le mot suppose . . . des pensées raffinées d'extrême civilisation, une haute culture littéraire, une âme capable d'intensives voluptés. . . . Il est fait d'un mélange d'esprit charnel et de chair triste et de toutes les splendeurs violentes du bas-empire. . . . C'est l'art de mourir en beauté."

In Verlaine's soul the world made havoc and music and he sang because he must: but the Decadents made him the master of a school and the slightest ripple on the still lake of his soul was hailed as the expression

of a *credo*. The Decadence found its incarnation in the exquisite Comte de Montesquiou-Fezensac, the supreme virtuoso of form gone mad, the arch-dissector of rare emotions and "sensations insolites," the incomparable connoisseur of subtle depravity whom Huysmans, it is said, took as the model of the hero of *Au Rebours*—the Duc des Esseintes.

The first appeal of the French Decadents when I made their acquaintance in Lemerre's four volume anthology was in their unreality, their remoteness: they drifted in a world of vague dream and vague velleity: they offered a narcotic, an escape from the hard North, blighting and withering with sleety East-wind in June. I read them, at sunset, in the beech glades of a hollow lane, while the winds passed high over the tree-tops bearing the awful purity of snow-topped mountains and the spray of a cleansing sea. I fled from the clear air of the peaks and the bleakness of the wind-swept uplands, and with some passage of Mallarmé in my memory, alambicated, precious, melting like some over-ripe sun-steeped grape on a far-secluded vine, I wandered slowly between the copper-lighted green of the young satiny leaves and the gold on the tall boles of the secular beeches. And to me then, as to Mallarmé, the mellowness of Saint Martin's summer and the dying rays of the setting sun were dear. "De même la littérature à laquelle mon esprit demande une volupté," Mallarmé had said, "sera la poésie agonisante des derniers moments de Rome, tant, cependant, qu'elle ne respire aucunement l'approche rajeunissante des Barbares et ne bégaie point le latin enfantin des premières proses chrétiennes."

I read Claudian and Rutilian and the *Pervigilium Veneris*: Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*, his *Chimères*, his *Vers Dorés*, and his

"Il est un air pour qui je donnerais . . ."

Gautier's *Albertus*: Aloysius Bertrand who, said Sainte-Beuve, had "worn away his youth in chiseling, out of a rich material, a thousand little cups of infinite delicacy": I even heard Wagner's *Lohengrin*: I copied out pages of Mallarmé in the dusty files of the *National Observer* and Henri de Regnier's *Hélène de Sparte* (the first I had read of him) from the *Revue des Deux Mondes*: Verlaine's *Lecture* at Bernard's Inn from the *Savoy* and many of his poems in a dozen magazines: I read Dowson's *Verses* and *Decorations* in their first editions: all Pater and all De Tabley. Then I went to France and met Merrill, now writing his *Quatre Saisons*, and Vielé-Griffin of whom I had as yet known little or nothing. I found that the Decadence was over and that Poetry, in France, had left "les lys languides et les lointaines princesses," and that, at Marlotte, Merrill breathed the pure air of the forest and drank the wine of sunrise after the strange liquors and miasmic effluvia of the stagnant night. Now no longer, at Mallarmé's,

"Les rhéteurs solennels en leur stérilité,  
Trônaient et discutaient la vie impérieuse!"

As Merrill wrote to me once: "The first work of the Symbolists consisted in disengaging themselves from Naturalism. Their reaction was perhaps exces-

sive in the direction of a dreamy mysticism, but it was necessary, and our return to the *essential* realities of life was the logical conclusion of our first principles. We loved Truth too much not to hate Reality, when it seemed opposed to Truth. We retired from the world and sought Truth, and some of us think that we have found it in Nature, others in the great anonymous crowd crying for Justice."

### III.

Stuart Fitz-Randolph Merrill has a remote association with Dublin. His father, seventy years ago, was a student in Trinity College. He was the only American there, and had hard work in defending the abolitionist cause, "as all those scatterbrained Irishmen were for slavery." Like Vielé-Griffin's father, General Egbert Louis Vielé, he fought on the Northern side in the Civil War. Stuart Merrill was born in Long Island. "Ma patrie, c'est l'Amérique, et je crache dessus!" he declared at my first meeting with him, in 1902, at the house of Henri Mazel. "Yes, I spit with something more behind!" And what was behind was his bitter disappointment that the United States, a blend of all nations, and thus, apparently, designed to escape the curse of chauvinism, had developed the disease in a most virulent form. "Ah! if I could wring the neck of that damned old spread-eagle!"

"I am of English, Scots, French and Dutch ancestry," he told me. "On my mother's side I am descended partly from French Huguenots who settled down for a generation in Holland. But I don't attach much importance to these matters, and I don't pre-

tend, like most Americans of wealth and fashion, to descend from the Conqueror."

After dinner, that evening long ago, we walked through the stillness of the Monceau quarter to some café on the Boulevards, and there Merrill talked to me of his friend Oscar Wilde. But it is not with the Rive Droite that my memories of Merrill are bound up. I saw him most often in his *appartement* among the tree-tops of the Quai Bourbon on the quiet Ile de Saint Louis. There Verlaine, in bronze, presided : and the enamel masterpieces of Armand Point made a setting for our talk, while a couple of monstrous Persian cats purred pleasant accompaniment. He is, to me, however, essentially the poet of the Forest of Fontainebleau : not of tourist-haunted Barbizon, still less of Royal Fontainebleau itself, but of Marlotte secluded on the wildest edge of the Forest and Montigny straggling with red roofs down to the slow Seine. If I think of him in any other setting, the blazing sunlight of Provence, her gray olive-groves and the red cliffs of her passionate shores and the burnt mountains of her background and the blue sea set with white sails frame my memories of him.

I was a tramp in those days : and it was to me, as he knew me then, that in 1908, he dedicated his longest poem *Le Vagabond*. I remember a meeting at Cannes. I had come to lunch with him from Grenoble, over the snows of Mont-Cenis down the awful valleys of Piedmont to Napoleonic Turin : pausing in Genoa, hard and cruel in its splendour of Renaissance palaces : then along a blaze of blue sea and orange groves to the dark gorges of Vintimille and a tumble of falling streams, and under bare gray

mountains and hill-perched white towns set in a mantle of gray olives to red Agay and fashionable Cannes. A few weeks before my letters to Merrill had come from Browning's Asolo: from Venetian valleys rolling with sunset clouds and peeling with the many-voiced Angelus of a hundred villages beneath the red glow of the Dolomites in their caps of snow. I had awakened to sunrise far over the plain, stretching with poplars and cypress, orderly, like the background of an early Master, to the blue horizon of the Euganean hills: and one day I had walked down the Collino Asolano, with the blue Adriatic dotted with white sails below me and the mountains of Istria beyond, and had come to Venice, silent and frozen on a New Year's Day. And a few months later I wrote to him from Copenhagen, red and comely on her isles and lakes among the green flats of wooded Denmark: from Lund sunk in everlasting peace in the cool shadow of her Roman Cathedral amid the rolling, untidy uplands and ragged cornfields and dark forests of Scania.

My letters, Merrill used to say, sprang on him from the ends of Europe, and wherever he happened to be (and he too was a tramp), he would get a telegram from five hundred miles away to announce one of my rare visits.

We met also, I remember, in Brussels: and in Dover I saw him for the last time. I enticed him as far as Canterbury, but further he would not go and we returned to Dover. The last years of his life he spent at Versailles. I never saw him there: some brooding sorrow I never fathomed had come over him, and the most I could get was a letter occasionally, and then his

letters, too, stopped. One of the last was to tell me of the visit of Lord and Lady Dunsany whom I had sent to him : he had liked them very much. But he would not see me again.

He died, as he had lived, a Poet, and in opinion (if the opinions of a Poet matter) a Revolutionary Socialist. He had no traffic with place or power : no ambitions : and when the 'Wild Asses of the Devil' broke loose, he gave no cry of encouragement. Like his friend Moréas he might have said : "*Je n'ai jamais rien fait qui fût indigne d'un poète.*" But he was, unlike Moréas, totally unassuming. He was full of generosity and humanity, hating only those who degraded the function of the Artist, or dishonoured humanity with cant, hypocrisy, greed or violence. A letter of his to me, dated December 26th, 1906, may serve to give some idea of his attitude :

"How I feel and understand your desperation in industrial Leeds. I felt the same chill in brain and heart during my five eternal years spent in New York. Humanity is going through a nightmare. The old Rhine that I have just visited is spoiled by factories, and in fact all Germany is saturated with the industrial spirit. Take Schweinfurt. . . . It was a quiet and quaint mediæval city, with picturesque ramparts. It is now surrounded by factories, the ramparts have been destroyed, nobody knows why, and the moats filled up. It is now a hideous, melancholy and unwholesome city, with a minority filling their money bags and a majority stupefied by work and drink and voting like sheep for the Socialistic ticket instead of giving what



is left in their veins of good red blood for the violent betterment of their condition. . . .

"The remedies for ugliness, as for all evil, are to be sought in the future, and not in the past. . . . Socialism is stupid and conservative nowadays (especially in its home, Germany), the different labor parties of the world are vulgar and hopelessly near-sighted, but I see no salvation in the conservative parties. . . .

"I am more and more convinced that what we must fight with all our might and power of hatred is the religious and patriotic spirit. Of course, our chief aids in our work of destruction and renovation will be the vulgar, base, stupid mob. But can't you write a sublime poem on a scrap of filthy paper? Are we not ourselves born in blood and uncleanness? No, let us not be too dainty, and let us keep true to our Ideal of more Beauty, more Truth, more Charity in this world, even if it seems a sublime lie.

"I speak rather strongly on the subject, feeling often that there is no ground for hope and having ninety per cent. of the educated classes against me. But my philosophy helps me much . . . everything changes, nothing lasts nor can be fixed a second. And it is in this eternal course and movement of things that I find, strange to say, motives for courage and hope. Regret, remorse, love of the past are the forerunners of mental decay and death. Let us always strive for the mere love of strife. The world is all wrong to-day. It will be better to-morrow, and probably even worse than now the day after to-morrow. But we have eternity before us. . . ."

At another time he explained his lines

"Pour avoir voulu, ô mon âme affolée,  
Monter vers Dieu par l'arc-en-ciel,  
Tu pleures au fond de la vallée . . . ."

"I mean . . . that dreams avail nothing, that we can only advance step by step, that drudgery, trivial cares and little duties are on the way of spiritual regeneration." There is no short cut to God.

Merrill, looking round him at the masses in bondage to masters high and low, spiritual and temporal, is filled with passionate revolt against Church and State. The God of the Rulers obsesses him: and he, like Leconte de Lisle, pours out his hatred of this false Divinity in poems of overwhelming violence. The false so obscured his vision that he could not see the true. In the Church,

"Dont l'ombre ne s' éclaire  
Que des trois cierges allumés à l'autel,  
Devant lequel le prêtre solitaire  
Murmure la supplique éternelle "

he cries to his Beloved: "Oublie les blasphèmes du prêtre!"

"Ce ne sont pas tes fleurs qu'il faut  
A la féroce idole des prêtres,  
Mais le sacrifice de tout ton être . . . .  
Ce n'est certes pas ici qu'habite Dieu."

The Mother of God is "la vierge cruelle des douleurs," and where Vielé-Griffin heard a hymn of love and death and resurrection Merrill heard only the

"prêtre qui marmonne,  
Sous les trois cierges, sa litanie monotone."

And yet the spirit of *Les Quatre Saisons* is in the best sense Christian: the world must be born again, utterly renouncing its past of shame and sin: and for this end each man and woman must sacrifice all things freely without an afterthought. "The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to the lives around you would have to be abandoned."

"Let us go on toward to-morrow's dawn," he cries in *Vers la Ville Inconnue*, for only

"En oubliant le nom de la ville d'où nous sommes  
Nous apprendrons celui de la ville où nous allons."

The hero of Merrill's conte *La Route* dies because he turned back. "Malheur à ceux qui partent et s'en repentent! . . . Quand on est parti, il ne faut jamais regarder en arrière, . . . ni regretter les jours qui sont à jamais enfuis."

*Les Poings à la Porte* in *Les Quatre Saisons* is the supreme expression of the faith he shared with William Morris.

It is winter and midnight. "Here the lamp is dying with my hope. . . ." All things have failed him. The cup of dream is empty. He hears a knocking at the door. If it be his friends come bringing holly to deck his room "dont j'ai banni la Folie qui me fut trop belle," he will not open his door to the noise of their steps

"Car, ô mon âme, tu es lasse des chants et des danses  
Et du rire des violons parmi les ténèbres."

If it be a tramp of the Forest come begging a crust of stale bread and a jug of sour wine, he will light his fire that the outcast may warm himself, and he will pour him wine and break him bread. For a "Dieu fou" has smitten him.

But if it be the Son of Man Himself, come in resplendent white with all his train of sick and halt, madmen and children, to call him

"sur la route sans fin  
Vers les villes qu'on ne voit pas encore à l'horizon,"

making in the night "le geste immense du pardon," then indeed, he will take his stick and go, happy to believe at last,

"Détruire, pour les rebâtir, les remparts trop vieux,  
'Où se déferleront demain les étendards de Dieu!"

#### IV.

In Merrill's later work the sacrifice of the individual to the world becomes the sacrifice of the individual to himself, and the lines

"Only by forgetting the name of the town we have  
left  
Shall we learn the name of the town to which we  
are going"

acquire a new meaning, no longer of an ideal of service, but of an ideal of self-realisation through sacrifice.

"Let us go in spite of all toward to-morrow's

dawn." Merrill's great poem *The Vagabond* is the most complete expression of this point of view.

The poet is enjoying life to the full in his "May-garden, amid the tall trees, raising up as an offering to spring their branches burning with a thousand flames of red and white bloom." Suddenly he sees tramping along the road, biting off the petals of a rose, singing and laughing without cause, a Vagabond. The Vagabond speaks first in song and then in silence. The meaning of his song is life and hope and joy. The meaning of his silence is sacrifice. Not only is there a world to live in to the full: giving and taking to the utmost all there is to give and take, joy and sorrow, love and pain. This will save neither the poet nor his fellows. The fulness of life is good, but the fulness of life is not the obvious fulness only: it is to be sought also on devious and dark ways of oblivion and sacrifice. While Vielé-Griffin's Helen, her russet hair floating on the wind about her, as she appears between the willows, may symbolize one side of the ideal fulness of life, yet she and all she stands for, joy and passion and pain, were but as the sunset seen across her streaming hair, part and parcel of a dying day, were not the other side of the ideal, the other strand in the web of being, represented by that Son of Man who died to save the world and make God more completely divine, whose wounds are bleeding for ever, and the firmament red with His blood. Through the same agony as His have passed the martyrs and the saints of all confessions, the heroes of all revolutions, the lords of life and joy and love. For only beyond Gethsemane and the Crown of Thorns, beyond Lethe

and the "moonless mere of sighs" lies the fulness of body and soul that we seek.

It is well, indeed, that Nora Murray in her passionate need for self-realisation should send Ireland to Hell sooner than lose herself, but it is necessary also, to take an example from another Irish play, that Michael should forget his bride and follow Kathleen, the daughter of sorrows.

First, then, the message of the Vagabond in song :

"He turned not back to dream over the old way.  
A servant of the future, he was burdened with no  
memories nor remorse . . .

"Art thou not," cries the poet, "the far-off child of  
the Wise Men who followed the star and found God?  
Or art thou not perhaps . . . the unknown  
prophet leading the peoples through the ages . . .  
toward the promised land of orchards and flowers,  
where one day, after sorrow without end, lovers em-  
braced will sing, giving their lips to one another? O  
vagabond, friend of foxes and hares . . .  
Messiah or criminal, await me! I have understood  
the meaning of your call . . . I have shut my  
door on peace and love without regret . . . 'Tis  
not by sleeping in old dwellings that we learn to build  
upon the new ways . . . O my mouth, bite deep,  
till hunger be appeased, at the fair, forbidden fruits of  
the tree of life! Destroy, O my fists, by fire and by  
sword, the temples raised to false Gods . . .  
and thou, my heart, O my heart, be pitiless when the  
people, breaking chains and crosses, shall send all  
priests and soldiers and judges and kings to die on the  
scaffold dripping blood in the dawn! O vagabond,  
I hear in thy clear loud song the fall of the towers of

the cities of night . . . and I hear the blare of the red trumpets of revolt . . . and I welcome the banner of gold of that great day of purification when men, leaving blasphemous cities, shall cry loud to the eternal vault of heaven the pride of life, now free at last from tyrants and from Gods!" And so the poet starts out, his soul filled with the fierce passion of life, to follow the Vagabond. But he has disappeared and his song is heard no more.

For there is more needed than mere progress to a glorious goal. The poet must sacrifice all he holds dear without any certain or definite promise, without a leader along the unknown, lonely road.

"O Vagabond, having learned the secret meaning of thy Song, I learn now that of thy silence. It is that I must seek, alone and without sinking of heart, the road thou followest toward to-morrow's dawn . . . I must go alone toward the receding goal, the fair country which I shall never know.

"I shall go alone whither destiny leads me . . . Old men seated at cottage doors will hurl insults after me. Even little children with lovely eyes will follow me, spitting and throwing stones at me. And in summer, as, with dust-laden eyelids, I pass like one demented near the wells by the grass banks beside the road I flee upon, no woman will hold out to me the pail of cool water wherefrom the labourer drinks as he drops his spade and rests from work. Then I shall go toward the Town, whither all roads lead . . .

"O Vagabond, over tombs and nights, raising up my dark hands toward the dawn, I follow thee."

So for Merrill the procession of life takes the semblance of a river flowing past cities and gardens,

out-worn, once glorious desires, and cast-off splendid  
ideals, toward the Sea of Godhead, and its further  
shore,

“where quintessential stands  
In over-lordship of all mystic lands  
The burning essence of divinity.”



## VIII.—FRANCIS VIELE-GRIFFIN.

### I.

**V**IELE-GRIFFIN does not deny that our desires are unattainable, or being attained, fail to satisfy. His optimism is no irresponsible dream of impossible bliss. But to him Life is a pilgrimage, and poetry is the song of its vicissitudes, of the joy and sorrow of the search, of the triumph and despair of the long journey—joy, triumph, for the journey is a brave, glad journey leading toward God and selfhood, sorrow, despair, for the search is a long one and full of passionate good-byes—farewells said for ever, “words abhorred of comfortable men.” It is a song, and not a wail, because in all the vicissitudes burns the intensity of unconquerable hope, shines the light through the darkness from the throne of God. To Leconte de Lisle the journey of life was along the road to Death, to Vielé-Griffin along the road of a fuller Being.

The long procession of the Gods man has created, like the pilgrimage of life marked out by cast-off desires, left Leconte de Lisle horror-stricken and despairing. Is nothing true? Is there no escape but in Nirvana from Maya the eternal illusion? Is there no absolute anywhere? And finding none, the poet yearned back to his own old desires and to the shed beliefs of his race, regretfully, in an eternal looking

backward, not knowing that each one of us, like the race, must live from day to day. What is truth to-day will be untrue to-morrow, not because there is no truth, but because the realisation of the race as of ourselves is progressive towards an unknown goal. We cannot sum it up in a complete and final selfhood that lasts for ever and is, now and eternally, satisfying.

The fulfilment of desire is pale after desire itself. We must go on to new desires and break new "glittering gates." The joy is in the journey and in the breaking of the gates. And the last gate we break is Death. Each time we put behind us our past desire, our past gate, and lay down all our former dreams and aspirations. That is the only way to live for any man. And for the race, it has made and thrown aside innumerable theogonies of Gods, and who shall say, even if the God of to-day grows pale and fills our souls no longer, that He was not true and that there is no truth? Who shall tell what countless new pantheons shall rise and rule and be adored and fall and pass into nothingness and rot on the rubbish heap of worn-out Gods, nor what the end shall be, if there be an end, when the ultimate God emerges and we, with Him, shall have evolved and won to final and absolute being through the partial revelations and struggles of uncounted myriads of years?

That is what Vielé-Griffin knows, and what the poets of the mid-nineteenth century did not and could not know. On the one side we have the stagnation of despair, on the other the infinite promise of life. And Vielé-Griffin has sung the fulness of this inviolable hope with a passion and intensity of conviction that has never been equalled in all the history

of verse. His is, in a sense that transcends even the more literal if less essentially real meaning of such words in the burning soul of Francis Thompson, a hymn of love and death and resurrection, glorious with the tremor and light of invincible belief.

There lies the difference, the essential and unbridgeable gulf, between the poets of yesterday and those of to-day. A spiritual renaissance separates them. Leconte de Lisle sorrowed and denied. Griffin and Merrill believe and rejoice in the midst of sorrow, knowing its meaning.

And if Vielé-Griffin sings above all of the joy of life, of the ecstasy of the ultimate revelation, and Merrill sings rather of the sacrifices on the way, of the inevitable and irrevocable good-byes, both have conceived of life as a pilgrimage towards a goal, and have read its meaning in terms of an ultimate end.

## II.

At a moment, perhaps the lowest that modern thought has seen, when, in Mockel's words, "*la douleur semblait plus artistique que la joie, la pureté n'offrait guère d'intérêt,*" when "*le vice, la maladie, la souffrance et la mort*" alone were beautiful, when the supreme effort of art was to paint moral and physical perversion by the pen of a Rodenbach or a Huysmans, a new wave of natural feeling swept through poetry, cleansed all forms of art, and, without denying either vice, disease, suffering or death—for these too have their place—turned the artist once more to the glory of life.

It was time. Science, once justified, like Art, in its search for truth alone, in its wish to see things as they

are, had begun to forget that the ultimate end of such a Science for Science's sake, as of Art for Art's sake, could only be a clearer vision and an intenser sense of life itself in its manifold aspects. The means had become an end, the Holy Graal of life had been forgotten. The man of science, become, in Renan's words, a mere looker-on at the universe "*savait que le monde ne lui appartenait que comme sujet d'étude.*" His imagination and his sympathy by which alone he could hope to transform *facts* into truth and see through the veil to the reality behind, had been allowed to die out as something unworthy. In Art, similarly, all idea of ultimate value in terms of life had been forgotten. The doctrine of Art for Art's sake had had its justification in that it could save Beauty, and through Beauty, Truth, from the ill-considered onslaughts of preacher and partisan, who, with no sight beyond the crude unrealities of Sect or Party, of Factory or Barrack, had sought to prostitute Art to the propagation, not of a personal vision of Truth, but of prejudices garnered on the rubbish-heap of mouldering cants and creeds. But very different from this refusal to serve Fact is the refusal to serve Truth itself, the assertion that Beauty has its roots in dream or form and not in the ebb and flow of life from which it rises to return again, in passion and fire, in joy and pain and shame and love.

Now that truth, no longer the precious vision to be preserved from the false believers and charlatans of didacticism, of sectarian and secular dogma, of political cant and rant, was classed but as another, if somewhat lesser heresy, to be avoided, like the others. by the true artist, now that the Holy Name was

blasphemed, it was time, indeed, for Laforgue, that obscure herald of the spring, to arise, crying, almost in spite of himself, like some Saint John the Baptist in the wilderness of the Decadence : " *Faites de la vie telle quelle et laissez le reste, vous êtes sûr de ne pas vous tromper !* " It was time that a new generation should kiss life with burning lips and feel at last the unsuspected power of the insistent Force at the core of things, of the God who will not be denied, the life-giver with whom we are bound up for ever, drawing ever nearer to Him.

### III.

Francis Vielé-Griffin's was the first great voice to be raised, on the side of life and joy, against the "decadence" that had taken possession of French poetry. It must have come as a note of something almost Messianic to hear his song of hope :

" Il n'est pas de nuit sous les astres  
Et toute l'ombre est en toi,"

his call to faith—not the faith that denies this life in its mystery and wonder and glory, but the truer faith that exalts it :

" Croyez, sachez, criez a pleine voix,  
Que l'Amour est vainqueur et que l'Espoir est roi ! "

The poet of Yeldis, Helen, Welland, and Phocas is no silly optimist of the jingle plus clap-trap order. His is a serious and noble voice speaking to a sick world of a life that is full and splendid, and a joy that

is hard and severe, but greater than all things else.

*La Chevauchée d'Yeldis* is one of Vielé-Griffin's finest poems. Yeldis, daughter of a mysterious gray-beard, was loved by five young men, Philarch, rich and of noble birth, learned in all wisdom, Luke, foppish and self-contained, a drunkard, his brother Martial, Claude, pale-faced and smiling, loving Yeldis like a wondering child, and another who tells the story.

One evening, after her father's death, at sunset, Yeldis set out. The five lovers followed her, across the plains, through strange cities, over rivers and mountains.

Philarch and Luke lost courage one day, turned their horses' heads and wearily went back. Yeldis smiled and spurred on the faster. Claude, at one of their halts, sat down to play the flute and sing. He went to sleep and woke no more. Yeldis and her two remaining lovers started again over the boundless plain. One day as they were drinking at a spring, Martial, who knew his mind and dared all things, spoke, saying :

" On my soul I love you,  
And I will die, if it be your will,  
But tell me whither we go."

Yeldis turned and smiled, then, mockingly pointed onwards.

" Martial went up to her and took her hand,  
Like a man and frankly.  
She bowed her head like a child.

And suddenly, in the full beauty of his youth  
And will and love,  
Unhesitatingly,  
Calmly, silently, without a cry,  
He took her in his arms."

And they rode off together.

Martial won Yeldis, for he alone knew how to give himself utterly to her, throwing down all hopes and dreams before her.

The disappointed lover who was left, faithful and gentle, had lost her. But from having followed her—Yeldis, incarnate Desire, the living Ideal—he had won and kept ever fresh in his soul the joyous emotion and intensity of life and knew that

"La Vie est belle de bel Espoir!"

This poem belongs to 1893. The series of poems entitled *Au Tombeau d'Hélène* (1891) gives another rendering of the same conception. The poet is seeking Helen. The road is long that leads to her. He regrets

"The sorrow and the blasphemy and lie  
Of making ever for a receding goal."

He yearns to see this Helen of the matchless eyes, towards whom runs, long and straight, over the plain, the great road leading through the dusk. With deathless hope and invincible faith in his heart he goes on his lonely journey.

At last Helen draws near. The poet knows that all

things but one are vain—vain love, vain the ineffable love of our springtime, vain the kiss we dream divine, vain all poetry and glory. All there is, is to worship Helen in silence,

“To master our dream and keep silence for ever.”

Helen appears. But the glory of her form is veiled. The poet knows he shall not see her splendour unveiled, shall not gaze, rapt, at the ineffable Absolute of God.

“I am,” she declares, “queen of Sparta and queen of Troy. All life yearns to me. I am Helen whom all poets loved and wise men worshipped. If I threw off my veil that stands between thee and thy desire, the fire of my unveiled form would burn all life away.”

For who are Helen and Yeldis but the fulness of life for which men live and endure all sorrows and all illusions, that joy which beckons them an instant in the eyes of the Beloved, not her, but for the moment dwelling in her?

“The touch of glory in the sunset-west,  
The indefinable essential thing,  
The poet's dream, the halo round a God,  
The hope upraising man to deity,  
The fragrance of all flowers, and the light  
That shines on morning seas, the quietude  
Of night, bestrewn with points of fire, the joy  
That rises leaping in a living heart,  
The blood within the chalice, and the bread  
The priest has blessed, vice-regently for God  
—All these you are, and you are more than these,”



says the poet, addressing Helen—" 'Tis life I seek,

"Life, only life, ineffable, unknown,  
Eternal life that lives when all is dead,  
Surviving worlds, and men, that princes give  
Gladly their crowns for, and their place on Earth.  
And all the pomp of their half-God-like throne,  
And poets give their laurels, casting down  
The world's praise and all beauty at your feet,  
And turn divinely to the Orient star  
That rises in the infinite of your face!"

Welland the Smith, in Vielé-Griffin's poem of that name, learned to conceive of life as an unceasing search, an unquenchable thirst :

"For there is no rest for a soul  
Drunken with immense desire :  
No sword wrought in the flame,  
Nor holy love of a woman,  
Nor art with its crown of glory,  
Appease the hunger of life."

Phocas the gardener dared not sacrifice his memories and illusions. He would not put aside his past life and break the glittering gate beyond him. A Christian by birth and early associations, he could not make up his mind to renounce a faith he did not believe and accept the life and love offered him by the paganism that he really felt in his heart. Paganism and Thalia on the one hand, death on the other ! He died a martyr to a faith that was not his because he could not like the poet of *La Partenza*, brave himself to abandon all old things and go unflinching

"upon the opening road  
Toward the wide green sea."

He died the irrevocable and irredeemable death—in time and eternity, for he refused to be himself, refused to follow life whithersoever it led.

For he who would live, who would be fully himself, gaze on the naked glory of Helen, look on God in the face of His light must lay down all old and disused ideals and outworn desires for ever—times without number!

And that is why Vielé-Griffin has written the stories of Saint Julia and Saint Dominantia and the other virgin martyrs who loved life so well, and so intimately felt its true meaning, that they followed it, joyfully, in the fulness of love and beauty, even to death and the burning crown. Not because Life is nothing to them, as to some sour ascetic brooding like the Preacher on the vanity of all things, blaspheming God in the holiest of his works, but because Life is all, the only thing that is or can be, and the very breath of creative energy itself, they follow it whither it leads, and in the ineffable call to martyrdom hear the clarions of hope undying, and beyond the flames the goal of self-hood to be won at last.

Dominantia, daughter of a king, riding on her white palfrey to the court of her betrothed, laughing and singing as she goes, reaches Saragossa, her first halt, at nightfall. She finds the town drunken with the blood of Christians, victims of Roman justice, administered by a brutal Praetor.

Without a moment's hesitation, young and frail and lovely, the Princess rides through the yelling crowd,

past the executioners, proudly and calmly, till she stops beneath the Praetor's throne, and beseeching and reproaching by turns, calls on him in the name of God, in the name of the Roman Peace, to desist—threatens, commands, implores, and suddenly stops short, terrified at her own audacity.

The obscene Praetor, leering and sneering, condemns Dominantia, as penalty for her insult to the majesty of Rome, to kiss him.

And as the crowd, brutal like its master, laughing and cheering, crowds to see, the Princess, without a word, raising her arm, brings down her riding whip full in the Praetor's face, tearing his flesh with its thong.

She was burned with all her escort at the stake, her pride and her courage unshaken, and her soul, it is said, rose to Heaven on a fiery charger.

The story of Saint Julia is put in the mouth of her lover, who, having bought her at Carthage from the Vandals, and coming to love her day by day with

“some sweet, sad, far-off love”

was taking her home on his ship. Her martyrdom at the hands of a band of drunken merchants, at Cynos, on the feast-day of Cybele, is told so convincingly and beautifully that we see her for ever standing,

“Grave, with brown hair flowing  
Between the burning torches and the moon.”

Her lover tells the tale to a priest, and, scornfully, asks :

"You who call upon her on your knees,  
What do you know of her? What did you ever  
know?

Only that they killed her like cowards,  
That she witnessed to Christ beneath the lash  
Till death! That is enough for you,  
For your hymns sung  
To pale, ascetic virgins floating on unsubstantial  
clouds;

But I, I saw her live!  
I kissed the cheek they struck.  
Do you think I am mad?  
Do you think I will praise Christ for her death?  
But let me be a Christian in my way,  
For I loved her truly,  
Day by day and hour by hour!  
I pray to her and love her without sacrilege  
I pray to her and weep."

#### IV.

This "believer," this Catholic, is no less the fervent apostle of passionate life in its intensity of energy and will, than the atheist Merrill, who has cursed "*la féroce idole des prêtres*," or Retté who saw, in his unregenerate days, "*les brasiers nourris d'or des églises en flammes*." The throb of reality is beneath the various garments of their thought; the wind of life blows free behind the arras of their verse, and all, and many others with them, have shaken free from the trapping of death and despair the gorgeous or the wistful or the burning burden of their song. Conversion, acceptance, faith, heads bowed to the Babe of Bethle-

hem, perhaps, but only in so far as the Babe of Bethlehem is the avatar of that evolving, ever-becoming God, with whom we and all life are bound up for ever, growing to birth and being as He, for ever-changing, wins ever nearer to His own ultimate completion in the changeless light of Absolute Being.

Vielé-Griffin abhors all that is opposed to life in its fulness. While Merrill is called a Socialist and a Free Thinker, Vielé-Griffin is a Catholic and a reactionary. He detests the spurious democracy of the French radicals who blaspheme against all great and noble ideals,

" qui te blasphemènt,  
O Christ, Dieu de douleur, Dieu suprême."

The poet whose heart is "bleeding with the hymn of life and death and resurrection" can, indeed, look with scant sympathy on "the foul, grovelling, blaspheming mob" which, in France, affects the Socialist doctrine. He knows that democracy, with its machinery of representation of fools by knaves, has reaped the harvest it deserves. It has made possible and profitable the appeal to the folly and passion of the Mob—that Mob, gullible in proportion as greed has blunted the little wit it has left after the systematic destruction of all qualities of brain and character which we miscall education, that Mob which is so utterly unlike the People, sanely occupied in the production of real wealth and humanised by contact with nature, innately loving beauty and justice, to whom Vielé-Griffin declares the poet must go, not to teach but to learn.

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And yet what Socialist could inveigh more fervently, with more burning eloquence against the hideous squalor and horror of industrialism than this same Vielé-Griffin who, telling of the suicide of a factory-boy, declares :

“Best die as thou diest, I believe,  
Best turn aside from our shame.  
. . . Take death rather,  
Know how to die without fear.  
. . . Tremble not, be strong  
In thy disdain  
And spurn the life they offer, starving child !”

No revolutionary could have thrown more contemptuously upon the society of to-day with its venal patriotism of the bank and the exchange than this reactionary, this clerical, who with consuming scorn, tells us that this poor factory-boy, died for his country — “est mort pour la patrie,” for the fatherland of all great spirits, for life itself and God the fountain-head of life :—

“For life is fair and holy,  
Life is joy and pain and mystery,  
And to die, as thou diedst, without fear,  
We must love the dream of life :  
They lied who said life was  
Only a little mortal bread and wine;  
They killed thee thrice, denying  
Love and God and thy humanity;  
But if they made thy life according to their shame,  
Refusing the life they offer, thou conquerest them.

"As surely as swords and torches  
Brandished at palace-gates,  
Better than the harvest of hate  
—Corn trampled in the furrow,  
Crowds stamped by the feet of the horses,  
Better than the sea of tears . . .  
Thy death is a protest, a tremor of dawn  
Risen over Golgotha still bleeding!"

All Viélé-Griffin's work is a hymn to life, and the burden of it all is this :

"Croyez, sachez, criez à pleine voix,  
Que l'Amour est vainqueur et que l'Espoir est roi!"

Life is a cup, full to the brim, without lees, a sacramental chalice, filled with more than mortal wine. We and all life with us are bound up for ever with God, and we hear, in Griffin's verse, no longer the "long roaring of eternal life," no longer despair and shame and horror, but the paean of hope and victory, and of ultimate self-realisation in the absolute of God.

## V.

I met Viélé-Griffin for the first time, in 1902, in Stuart Merrill's study, high up among the tree tops of the Ile de Saint-Louis. Through the open window came the points of light dancing on the Seine and the subdued gay hum of the great city. We were all talking: our voices rose higher and higher. Griffin was sitting alone, in a corner by the window, looking out over the town. Perhaps his eyes looked on Saint-

Dominantia in Barcelona, or Saint-Julia "between the burning torches and the moon." Perhaps lost in the splendour of her tresses, his passionate lips were laid on Helen's. He was with us, but he was different from any of us. He had no part, even outwardly, in the Symbolist Bohemia. Indeed he rarely appeared in the haunts of the poets. Paul Fort might be seen in almost all the cafés of the *quartier* any evening : above all at the *Closerie des Lilas* opposite *Bullier*, where he did his best to drown his unique genius in bad alcohol, between Moréas and the Norwegian, Diriks. Merrill had not yet withdrawn from the fellowship. He did not do so at all till 1906 and not altogether till his second marriage in 1908. But Griffin already in 1902 lived a life apart, in his flat on the Quai de Passy and in his Château near Poitiers. He was a *grand seigneur* and a manufacturer of motor cars : a pillar of the Church and a devoted husband and father. He lived in some mystic sunlit garden : his high seriousness and intensity were attracted by no other intoxication than that of joy and belief. For him, as for Francis Thompson

"On Golgotha there grew a thorn  
Round the long prefigured Brows."

I first read *Yeldis* and *Helen* under the great trees of the Ile Verte at Grenoble, looking out over the shining river at the mountains of the Grande Chartreuse, white and dazzling in the sunlight, crowned with forests and bearing in their depths green valleys full of flowers. I took them with me through the infinite fields of myriad bloom, heavy with the hot perfume of exotic



spices, along valleys ablaze with peach and pomegranate, and in the darkness of burning nights that set the blood afire.

“ Réjouis toi et sache croire ”

I cried, exultingly, as I walked the stony, dusty roads of Dauphiny, sunk in banks of violets and slopes of orchid and asphodel, where I thought every moment to meet the Son of Man as of old in Palestine, and would raise my eyes from the hot fragrance and the insistent passion of the valleys to the high rim of the cold white mountain ridge above the belts of pines, or the rushing torrent of surging peaks that fled like a herd of buffaloes towards Italy, a mile above my head : till I knew not if the body were spirit or the spirit desire.

There, in that wonderful South, all life is seared with joy, joy as terrible as grief : the soul may be drunken with sorrow as with wine, and spring to new life in the very joy of pain : passion burns with an ineffable fire. Life is a golden cup, full to the brim, overflowing with intensity. Ready to drink it to the dregs, joy and passion and pain, I found, as I thought, the very image of it in the poems of Griffin. I went with Helen in my soul along the willows by the streams, or 'among the orchids and holly of the hills. I saw her hair unbound float on the night-wind and I steeped myself in the perfume of her breath. I took her even to the examination hall and won my doctorate partly in spite of one of the subjects I had chosen : the poetry of Vielé-Griffin, which I expounded to Professors of Phonetics and French Literature : the only

one who understood me and has remained to this day my friend and master was Georges Dumesnil—whom I mention with all honour and respect and reverence—the Professor of Philosophy and Education, a Conservative of the best tradition, a fervent and whole-hearted Catholic, who, walking with me along the infinite avenues of Grenoble, spoke with sadness unspeakable of the ruin that had come over France with the expulsion of the monks and the persecution of the Church, and likened the brown leaves falling from the trees to the true conception of life leaving France bare of all virtue and honour and hope. His were a true heart and a great soul. I cannot refuse to him the distinction of being, amidst a Radical and unbelieving Faculty, the one man of real understanding and of unflinching conviction and nobility, unable to stoop or to dream of stooping to any act or thought unworthy of what he believed to be the high heritage of the Catholic Church and of the French race.

He understood, and yet he knew where I was mistaken; he knew that my conception of life was too material. He knew, what I did not discover till 1909, in Griffin's own country, that I had misread, in one essential feature, the attitude of my favourite poet. Vielé-Griffin loves life: loves it with intensity: but the fire that burns his soul is the white fire of the spirit, not the red fire of youth aglow with passionate acceptance of the blazing South.

The poems of Vielé-Griffin are full of sunlight and the scent of flowers, brimming with the joyous life of France his mother, overflowing with all the loveliness of her smiling countrysides. The flowers, the burning noons and nights of France, white roads and forests

and sleeping hamlets and mistletoe in the apple trees, songs borne on the night-wind and laughter on the gay lips of the beloved—all that is in them. Whoever has learnt to love the sunlight and the shadow of the French lands, the sorrow and joy of their children, will turn ever and again to the pages of Vielé-Griffin, so that he may look into the deep eyes of France and see her smiling, sad and distant, under the branches of her chestnut trees.

But that is not all. The life he sings, with which his whole being trembles, is not the uprising of the victorious blood under the sun of Provence or Dauphiny in a crude gorgeous setting of asphodel on mountain fields and gentian on white limestone rocks and at night the moon full on peach and pomegranate blossom and the song of the children of joy.

I did not understand until I went to Griffin's own country and looked on the sunset through the stained glass windows of Tours Cathedral and saw the broad Loire flow towards the west on the plain past a pure white city. I sank myself in the clear spirituality of Notre-Dame de Nantilly, silent and white, amid the peace and austerity of Saumur: and then I knew that for the life which Griffin knew princes would give their crowns and poets their laurels and that all beauty and praise of Earth are but offerings cast at the feet of the ineffable and invincible Beauty of the Helen the poet sang.













